

# LEADERS OF HASSIDISM

BY

DR. S. A. HORODEZKY

*Translated by*

MARIA HORODEZKY-MAGASANIK

WITH A FOREWORD BY

THE HAHAM

DR. M. GASTER



LONDON

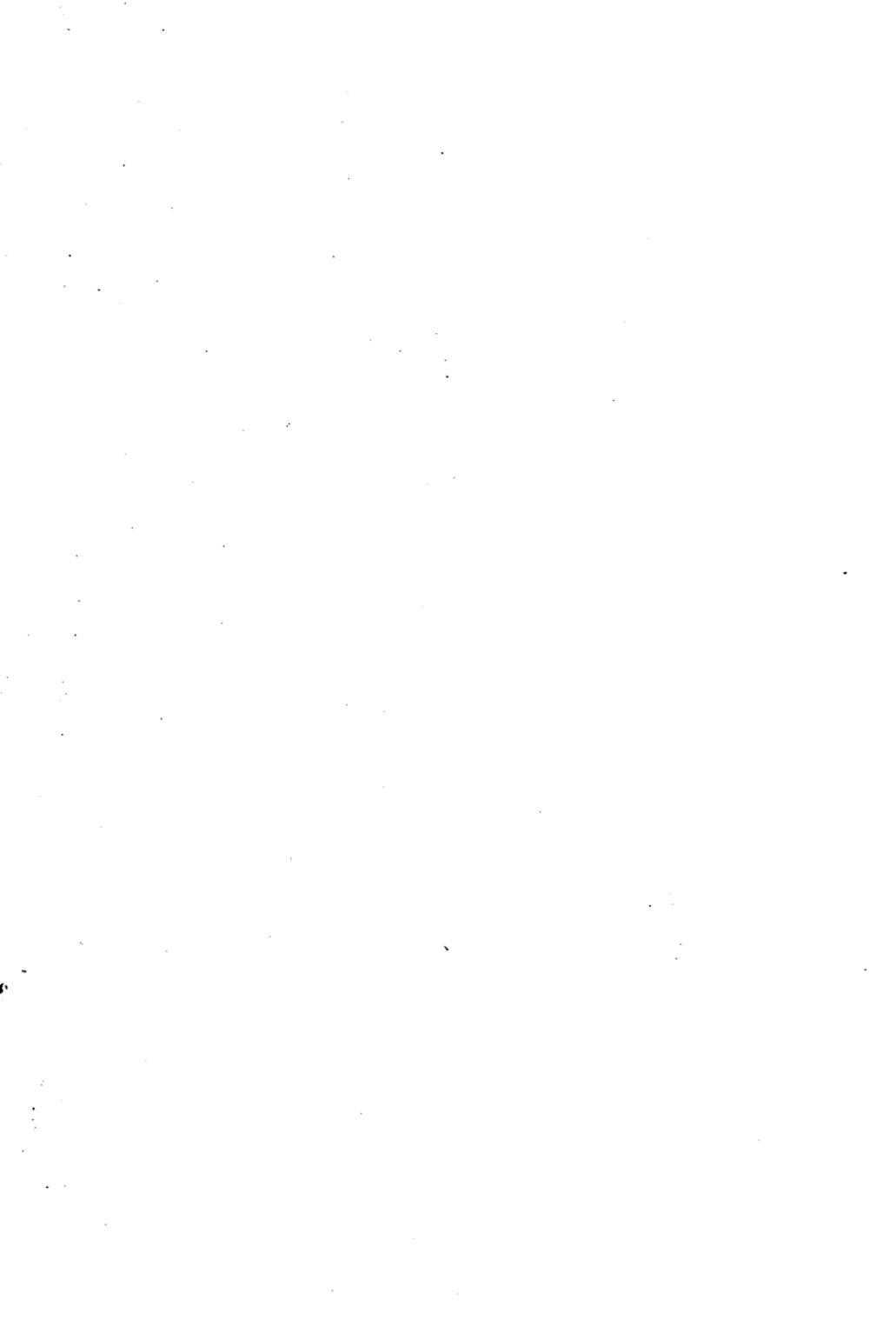
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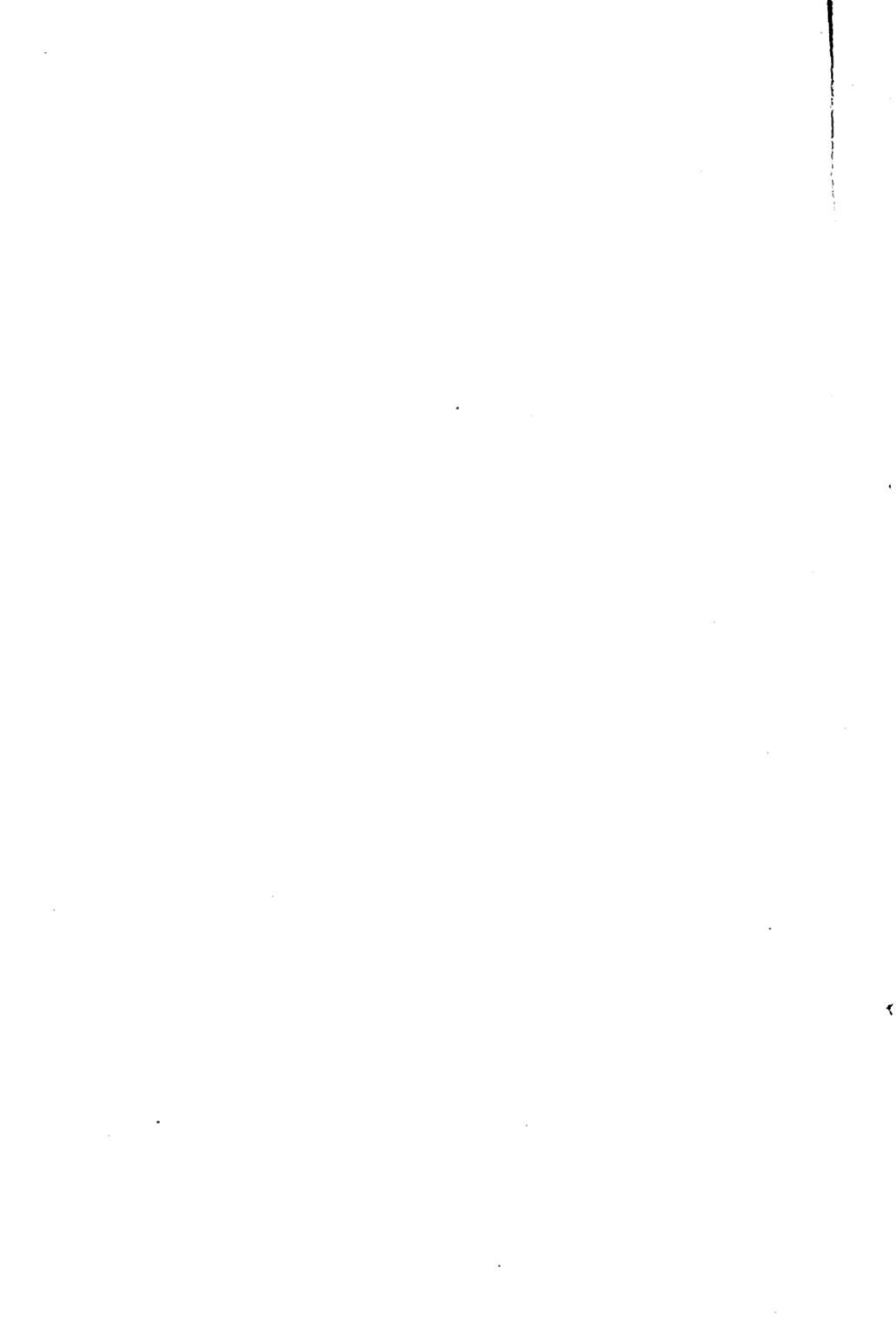
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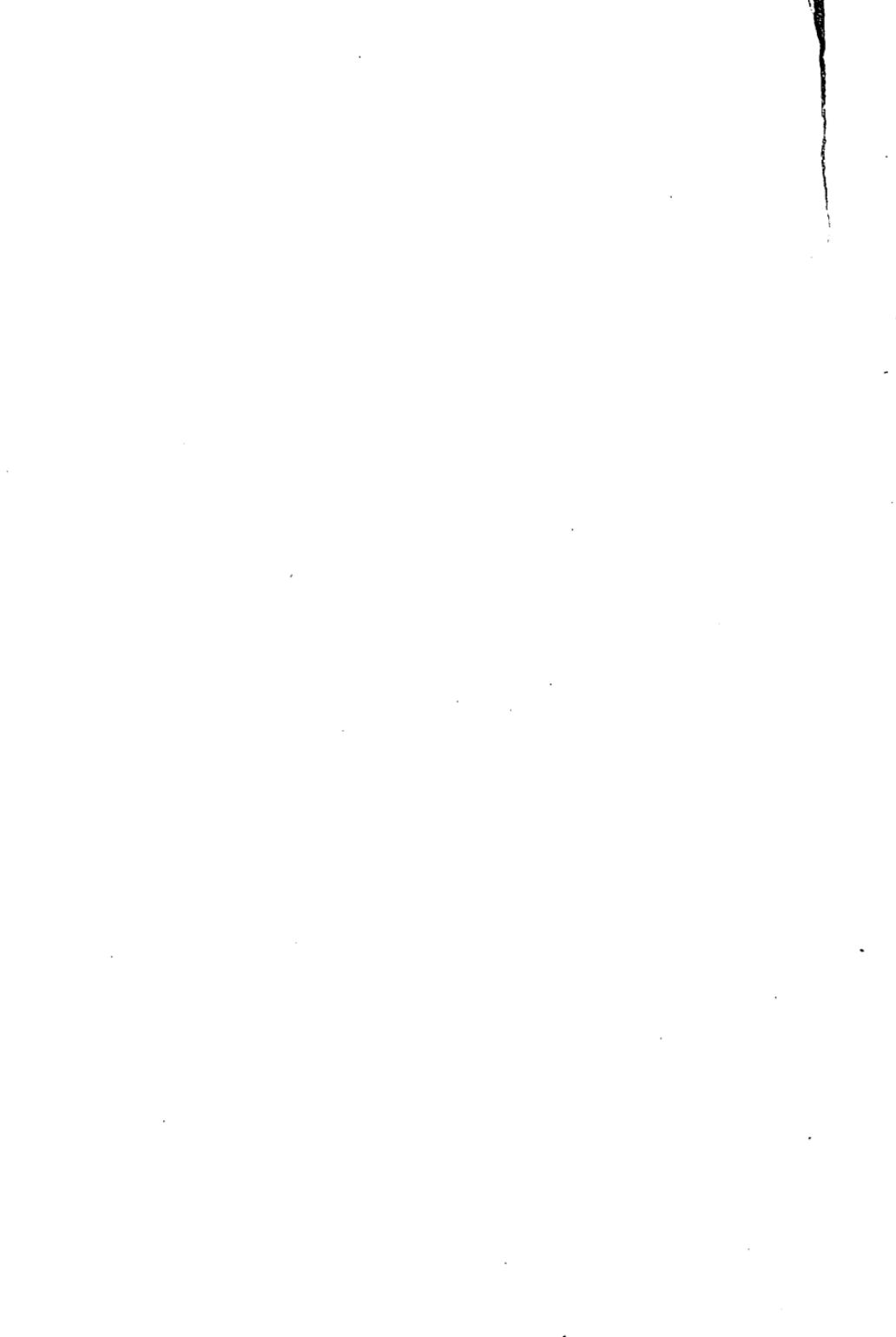
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OTTO M. SCHIFF, ESQ., O.B.E.  
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## FOREWORD.

Many an attempt has been made to describe that extraordinary religious movement which started in the middle of the eighteenth century in some remote corner of the Carpathian Mountains, and spread like wildfire over the surrounding countries. Like a burning flame it swept across the innumerable communities of Podolia, Ukraine, Galicia, and Moldavia, and kindled a fire of religious enthusiasm such as had never been witnessed before. It was not a message of the Advent of the Messiah which would stir the innermost feelings and revive the hopes cherished for centuries, nor any promise of worldly goods which would lift the masses from their social misery. It did not come from above, from the seat of the mighty, from the schools of the scholar, from the home of the philosopher—on the contrary, it came from the lowly, from the poor and the ignorant of the world and its ways; but it spoke with a tongue of fiery conviction, of deep enthusiasm, of overmastering eloquence. It brought hope and joy to the down-trodden, to the weak, to the ignorant. It opened up a new outlook upon the world, a new feeling of satisfaction and happiness. It brought to them knowledge of the nearness of God, of His love for them and their longing love for Him.

Much has been written about this movement of the Hasidim, and yet it seems to be an inexhaustible theme for the student of popular psychology. The beginnings of it are very obscure, and it would be very difficult indeed to trace them to any definite movement outside the Jewish world. Pietism, with which it has some outward affinities, could not penetrate to the fastnesses of the Carpathian Mountains, and reach the ear and understanding of men entirely away from any contact with the outer world.

True, the ways of the spirit are not easy to follow. From the vast ocean of human thought and feeling the waves may lap the walls of the Ghetto and play upon the shores of distant worlds. Whether an echo of the Pietistic movement has ever reached the vast solitudes of Podolia and Ukraine, who can say? Nor can the Hasidic movement be characterised as a revival; it never existed before in that form and intensity and therefore it never died down, to be revived again.

In order to understand it, however, it might perhaps be advisable to realise the actual state of the Jewish communities in the middle of the eighteenth century. The Jews lived there entirely cut off from the rest of the world, the landlords were feudal lords, there was no middle class worthy of the name and the peasants were almost ground to dust by the exactions of their feudal masters. No peasantry was more poverty stricken, more miserable and ignorant than the peasantry of those countries, and in between these two upper and lower grinding stones of the social life there lived the Jews trying to eke out a miserable livelihood, but filling up the gap of the missing middle class. They were driven in upon themselves, but they, as the People of the Book, continued their studies and kept the lamp of learning burning, sometimes brightly, sometimes dimly. In that world, left to themselves, a number of them gave themselves up to that peculiar study of Rabbinical legal literature which led to an extreme sharpness of the mind and to acute dialectic exercises called Pilpul, which made it possible for them to reconcile diametrically opposed principles, a kind of athletic sport of the mind. Thus, the intellect became as sharp as a razor, which, however, had a disastrous effect on the ethical principles of conduct. Morality and sentiment had to suffer where justification could be found for any contradictory action, and thus a

certain intellectual arrogance was rife among those who claimed to be the scholars and the interpreters of the Law from a purely legal point of view. They looked down with contempt upon the masses of the ignorant who were left, as it were, to themselves, who merely cared for the performing of the ceremonies and the punctilious observance of all the outward religious duties and obligations. The study of the Talmud was the only object of preoccupation and remained as the only object of value in life.

There came then a movement which was destined to stir up very profoundly the religious feelings of the Jewish communities in those countries. Scarcely a century before the whole Jewish world had heard with deep emotion of the appearance of a new Messiah. These messages coming from Turkey, whose empire stretched at that time close to the borders of Podolia, and covered many of the lands through which the Hasidic movement afterwards spread, reached those communities almost at first-hand. The news of a Messiah was carried all over Europe and produced everywhere a profound impression, even as far as England. It raised the hopes of a speedy deliverance from the state of persecution and misery in which the Jews were living, and opened up a vision of the Return to the Holy Land. It was, however, foredoomed to failure. Sabbatai Sevi, put to the test, ignominiously forsook his claim to the Messiahship, and left his duped followers to mourn over their disappointment. But a movement of this kind could not die out very quickly. An aftermath followed in which one of his disciples, called Frank, took up the mantle and started a wild propaganda for his own Messiahship; however he was soon unmasked. But it was in Poland and in that part of the world that he brought the greatest calamity upon the Jews, not only by turning Christian himself, but by inducing the Christian clergy, with the Archbishop at their head, to have the

Talmud burnt publicly in Kamenetz-Podolsk. One can easily imagine the effect of such a procedure—it was a blow directed at the heart and mind of the Jew, and must have greatly contributed to the bewilderment and spiritual anarchy, especially since Frank and his followers advocated publicly apostasy from Judaism.

No less great was the influence which the Zohar and all the mystical speculations including those of Lurjya and his successors exercised upon the mind of the Jew for centuries. The Kabbala was in itself antagonistic to the Talmudic teaching, but the study of it was always limited to a very small number of adepts. The masses were scarcely touched by its teaching and then only in a very attenuated form such as the doctrine of metempsychosis.

Another force may also have been working amongst the masses. A careful study of Hasidic practices and theories reveals a curious similarity to practices and beliefs among the Buddhists and their doctrine of the reincarnation of Buddha, notably the Mongolian Buddhists, and those from Tibet. The Mongolian influence upon the spirit and the habits of the Russian people, on its folklore and beliefs, has been very great, and it would not be surprising if something of it had reached also the Jews in their hamlets and towns. The contact between the lower masses is always much more intimate than people realise; the antagonism between nations begins with the higher classes. What has distinguished the Hasidic movement, however, from other apparently similar manifestations, with its blend of mysticism and sub-conscious Pantheism is the remarkable fact that there is nothing morbid about it, there is no contemplative meditation, seclusion from the world, self-mortification, abstinence, penance, esoteric speculation, introspection and absorption in the infinite, such as characterises all mystical movements. To the Hasidim, on the contrary, the world is neither the

habitation of evil spirits, nor are there demons haunting mankind, leading man away from the path of virtue. The world is not a vale of tears and all the energy of man is not to be devoted to self-annihilation, in order thereby to purge himself from all sin of the present life, or of lives gone by. On the contrary, this world is full of God. Everything is divine. Nature is there to be enjoyed. The world is there to be happy in. God is not to be served in a self-sacrificing manner, but one must be animated by the highest exercise of love, and lifted up by an inner enthusiasm, longing to be conscious of and to feel His presence. There is nothing evil in this world in which there is not something good, for in everything there is God in our very midst and in our hearts. It is not the abstract intellect which should be cultivated as much as the concrete sentiment, the deep feeling and yearning after the great, the good, the pure, and the beautiful; and all this is in us and around us. There are many ways in which one can serve God, but above all, by loving-kindness.

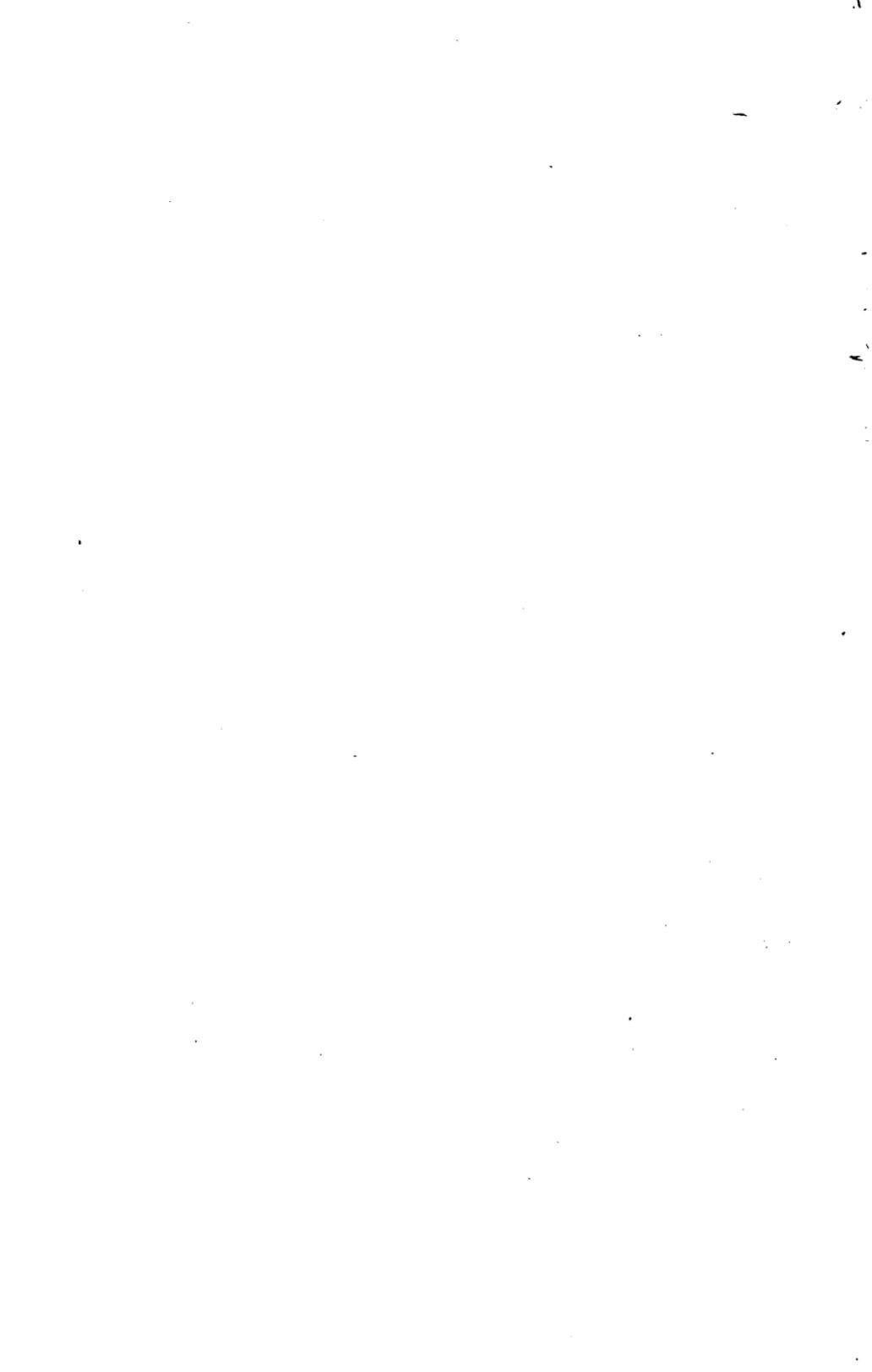
This was the message which the unknown, half-learned beadle and teacher of Mezhibesh first practised and then taught, and won for himself the immortal name "Baal-Shem-Tob" — "Master of the Divine Name". He had caught the spirit from his wanderings among the primordial forests of the Carpathian Mountains, by listening to the singing of the birds, by the whispering of the leaves gently touched by the wind, by the hum of the bee and by the gentle tread of the deer. He saw God also in the grand manifestations of Nature — the rolling thunder, the lightning flash, the rush of the stream, and the snow-clad peaks of the mountains. He soon gathered a number of pupils around him, and then following an old example, he sent missionaries and apostles to teach the new doctrine of human love, as well as that of divine love among the humble, the weak, the

down-trodden and the ignorant. They learned to worship God with a fiery enthusiasm which seemed to break all the bonds of traditional ceremonial, aye, they danced when praying and prayed dancing, for the Tsadik danced to the tune of the heavenly spheres and communed with the angels. The pall was lifted and the people, whose sky had been darkened, saw the clouds disperse, and the rays of a new sun of healing arise upon their humble dwellings and enter into their broken hearts. It was the revolt of devotional feeling against intellectual legalism. The masses rose to a height of spiritual life far above that reached by the then would-be leaders and teachers. A new world was opened to them, and how they responded to it and how it further grew and developed until it weakened and partly faded away, is the story told in the following pages.

The author, intimately acquainted with the history of the Hasidic movement, tells it in the best possible manner; he gives us here pictures of each one of the leading men, of their origin, of their manner of conversion to the new doctrine, of their activity, of their principles, and of the influence which they exercised upon the Hasidim. Each one has an individuality of his own, each one presents the story from a slightly different point of view, yet all united in the same common conviction that here was Heaven, that here was hope, and that here was God.

M. GASTER.





## PREFACE.

**H**ASSIDISM was handed down from one generation to the other for nearly two hundred years. Its outward form changed according to time and place, but its spirit has lasted to the present day in the minds of the Jewish people and has been spiritual food for many hundreds of thousands of Jews in various countries.

Hassidism is the last link in the chain of Jewish mysticism. It extends through Jewish history from the very beginning in the Prophets, the Apocolypse of the Jews, the Essenes, the Haggada of the Talmud and the Midrash — and then in the Kabbala. All these mystical currents have one source and the same characteristic features.

The mystic sparks have never ceased to shine in the souls of the Jewish people. It happens sometimes that they glimmer and hide themselves for a while, and then they light up again and reveal themselves in one way or the other.

And finally these mystic sparks took fire and manifested themselves in Hassidism.

Hassidism is the greatest religious movement in the history of Israel in the Diaspora. It has rooted itself deeply into the hearts of the people. It is the unique mystic movement which in spite of great opposition from official Judaism and in spite of all excommunication and attempts to thrust it out still remained within the fold, whilst the other religious movements which arose in the Exile, movements such as those of the Karaites, of Sabbatai Zevi, of Frank and many others were cast out.

In this book an attempt has been made to describe the lives and deeds of the leaders of Hassidism.



I.

**RABBI ISRAEL BAAL-SHEM-TOV.**



## RABBI ISRAEL BAAL-SHEM-TOV.

**A** CHILD of the common people, a son of unknown parents, and not the "son of famous ancestors", such was the initiator of Hassidism, "Besht".

He knew the Torah, but was not a "prominent scholar", not "ingenious" not "extremely well read".

He was capable of studying a simple Gemara, and of reading a Mishna. Of the Pilpul and its finesses he knew nothing. He knew also the Kabbala in all its simplicity, without any of its sophistries.

He lost both his parents at an early age. Without assistance from anyone he gradually worked his way up in life,— not without many struggles and much suffering. First he was an usher to a private tutor, then a servant in a school, then a teacher, a farmer, slaughterer, quack doctor,— healed wounds as a Baal-Shem, drove out evil spirits and demons, gave remedies and wrote amulets. Owing to the variety of his peculiar "profession", he was obliged to associate with every class of the people, especially with the humble. He went out from the people and came back again to the people, and the people received him with affection, listened to his words, took his "remedies".

And the Baal-Shem cured first the body of his people and then their soul.

From a miracle-worker he became an instructor. He knew his people and was able to be their teacher, because he had prepared himself thoroughly for this high task. It had not been easy for the Besht to find his God.

His desire was to present a true God to his people, and such a God he could not find in the prayer-houses nor in the schools, nor among the scholars and the Rabbis.

In every town where the "Besht" came and where the Jewish people lived, he found that their hearts and their brains were clogged, so he left the town. He went out and wandered in the fields and in the forests, over mountains and dales, wandered on and on seeking God.

"And sometimes"—so says the legend—"he walked in his deep meditations three days and nights, and no food of any kind passed his lips. He was seeking and searching for the true God, for the God of all creatures".

"And at last he found what he had been seeking".

"What he had not been able to find among the "God-fearing and the pious", among the scholars and the Pilpulists, he found among the trees and the grasses, among the shrubs and flowers. In the midst of these he learned to know God, the God of Nature, the God of the world, the God of all creation. "He understood the language of the birds and trees." Thus spoke of him Rabbi Baer, his successor.

And there he discovered himself, and became a teacher. He left the fields and the forests, the grasses and the trees, and went out among the people, among the wandering and distracted sons of his people.

"Woe unto us! he cried. The world is full of radiant, wonderful and elevating secrets, and it is only the small hand held up before our eyes, which prevents us from seeing the light."

And he began to teach God. Many people left the benches in the schools, closed the Talmud, ceased to rack their brains with the Pilpul and its hair-splitting disputes, and streamed out to listen to the Torah from the mouth of Baal-Shem.

This Torah was not new in its substance. It was an old doctrine, which he had renewed—the doctrine of the prophets and the Kabbala, the doctrine of simple and plain faith, without rabbinical or philosophical reasoning about the Godhead, the doctrine of devotion to God even to the suppression of the

ego, the doctrine of the heart, feeling and mysticism.

He led the people in love and pity and preached morality to them: "If you seek to lead your neighbour into the right path, you must do so out of love."

He won the hearts of the people, the poorer people, the sinners and the ignorant, who had been rejected by the scholars, because they did not know what the scholars knew, and could not do for Judaism what the scholars did.

Also well-known Rabbis, who, but a day before had based Judaism on the Pilpul and on brain-racking disputes, on asceticism, prohibitions and statutes, became followers and disciples of Besht, and became quite different people.

Rabbinism grew afraid, it perceived that a dangerous enemy had arisen and it began to fight the Besht with abuse, slander and deception. *slander*

But the people did not pay much attention to the attacks. They believed in the "Besht" and regarded him as a superman, a Zaddik.

He became the idol and mainstay for thousands of followers. They merged in him all their meditations, and their thoughts were only of him.

They began to tell wonderful stories about him. The father related them to his son, the mother to her daughter, and the Jews who lived far away heard of this wonderful man and they said: "A new Messiah has come unto us."

Some used to say that the soul of "Besht" was one of those souls which had retired before the "Fall of man" and had not tasted of the "Tree of knowledge"; others said that his soul was that of Enoch, and still others, that the body of "Besht" was composed entirely of spiritual matter, and that whenever food passed his holy lips a fire came down from heaven and caused it to ascend.

Some said that the teacher of Besht was Achijah of Shiloh, "who had received the doctrine from Moses our Teacher, and had been afterwards in the court of

Justice of King David, and the teacher of the prophet Elijah"; others knew that in heaven too they were occupied with the Torah of Besht, and that every Sabbath afternoon the Besht pronounced new secrets of the Torah in the celestial Yeshibah, and before the third meal he repeated them to his "earthly hearers".

They said more still about him. He walked over the Dniester on his girdle, he cured people of dangerous diseases, caused childless parents to have offspring; yea he made the dead to live. And all this he did through faith and prayer. He himself maintained that he was allowed to observe higher things not because of his study of Talmud and other religious books,—but because of his prayers, which he repeated with intense devotion.

One of his disciples says: "The word of God lay in Baal-Shem's hand, and if he pronounced a decision, he carried it out. He was unique. There had been none like him, and who would have been able to take his place." Another Rabbi said of Besht that there was no secret unknown to him.

They made of him a legendary figure. Since the time of Jesus of Nazareth there has been no man in Israel of whom so many and such wonderful stories were told.

"And through every legend thou tellest of Besht"—say Hassidim,— "thou accustomest thyself to spiritual things".

In the fields and in the valleys and on the summits of the mountains, Besht found the God of Nature, the God of Unity. "God is the place of the world and the world the place of God. Certainly, He hides himself behind many partitions and iron walls, but all far-seeing men know that the partitions and the iron walls, all these wraps and coverings belong to the inner being of God, for no place is without Him".

"Everything is created and formed from God's being, as this tortoise and its covering are completely one". Besht considered the whole of creation, and

in everything he saw the one God, who makes one Unity of all reality." "All things above and below are a Unity", and "so, thou lookest upon the Creator, praised be His name, and the Creator, being praised, looketh upon thee".

Besht found the Godhead everywhere: "in every thing there are worlds, souls and God, in everything there is an internal life of God". He explained the verses of Psalm 92, "behold Thine enemies, O God"—and says, "even in Thine enemies, in Satan and in Evil is only God", "even when a man exceeds bounds, even then, the Shechina is within him". His opinion was that it was necessary to serve God in everything and in every way, "to combine all things in the world with his sayings, and his doings, and to do this all in the name of God, in faith and simplicity, for nothing in the world is outside God's Unity, and he who does anything not in the name of God, separates his deed from unity with Him".

The God of Besht is the God of the prophets; he did not demand any sacrifice, or fasting, or asceticism. He did not wish mankind to decline; "man must take care of the health of his body," says Besht, "for if his body be sick, his soul must be weak too;" and sometimes, it is enough, "to serve God only with the soul, i.e., with the thoughts, — and the body remains quiet, so that it should not fall ill by being too much used." And the God of Besht does not ask too much penance. "It is not necessary to increase penance in everything that we do." Besht demands from the people, that in all their doings there must be joy and cheerfulness. "One must always be joyful", for, "sadness is a quality much to be blamed."

"Even if a man have committed a grievous sin, he must not give way too much nor be too sad."

Besht also broke through the fences of the Rabbis who held divine-worship at fixed hours and limited it by various warnings and commands; "this shalt thou do, and that shalt thou not do, here mayest

*right intentions*

thou pray to God, and there mayest thou not pray". Besht who loved freedom so much, and appreciated the beauty of freedom, freed divine-worship. "God desires to be served in every way, we must eat and drink, speak and walk—and be joyful with God. The chief things are right intentions and pure thoughts; if the thoughts of a man be pure and his intentions right—then in every place where he stays, the Shechina will be with him. He needs no fixed places to say his prayers, no synagogues; among the trees in the forest, everywhere one can pray and the prayer will be heard."

Prayer is "a limb of the Shechina", and must be only spiritual. One must pray only "for the suppression of Evil, and never for one's material well-being, for a separating veil arises if one admit the material into the spiritual". "And as a man prays for himself, so must he pray also for his enemy".

*body*

From all that we hear and read about Besht, we must imagine him a strong, healthy man, kind-hearted, always cheerful, going about a great deal, delighting to talk, and seeing the spiritual in everything; loving the field and the forest, and the open sky. And when he sometimes sees groups of Jewish people with bowed heads, bent backs, and sorrowful faces, he asks them: "Why are you so sad, why are your faces so miserable?" "We have not prayed properly" they say. "We have not studied in the right way. What are we indeed and what is our life? We have not yet accomplished even a fraction of our duties to our Creator, praised be His name!" "Cease!" cries Besht in his kindly voice, "Sorrow is a kind of Evil. If you have not studied enough,—study is not the principal thing. If you have not prayed rightly, believe! A Jew works all day long in the market place; towards evening, at dusk, he trembles and says to himself: "Woe unto me! I almost forgot to say the evening prayer"; and he rushes into a house and says his prayer, without

knowing what his lips are saying, and yet all the angels tremble at his prayer. No, the chief thing is the intention, the purity of heart and of thought. Now therefore leave sorrow and sadness; man must live in joy and gladness, rejoicing always in his lot."

There is a story which Baal-Shem once told to his disciples: In the same house there once lived a Talmud-scholar and a simple Jewish workman. Both arose very early every morning. The scholar went to the prayer-house and the workman to his toil. The scholar sat in the prayer-house for hours studying the Holy Books and praying till the dinner hour. And then well satisfied with the fulfilment of his duties to God; he returned home. On his way he met his neighbour returning tired and exhausted from his work; the workman had only a few minutes in which he could go into the prayer-house and say his morning prayer. The Talmud-scholar looked at him with contempt, and thought of the great difference between them—he studying so hard and so long in the Holy Books, and praying so diligently and this simple man had been busy all the morning with coarse work, and had only just said his morning prayer. The workman sighed, fearing for himself when he looked upon his neighbour the Talmud-scholar who had left the house early in the morning, at the same time as he, and had all these hours been occupied only with holy things, whilst he had been at his hard work.

Weeks, months and years passed in this way. The Talmud scholar died and not long after, the workman died too. The scholar was called before the heavenly Judge: "What hast thou done during thy life?" he was asked. "I spent my life in the study of the Talmud and in prayer" he replied, "I observed all the laws to the smallest detail". And he stood back well satisfied. "He despised his neighbour, the workman, who had no time to pray and did not have the knowledge of the Talmud",—intervened the celestial counsel. The scales were brought out; all

the Talmud studies and the prayers were placed on one side, and on the other his contempt for the workman. And behold! the contempt weighed down the scale on its side and a heavenly voice said: "The Talmud scholar has no place in Paradise."

Then the workman came up. "What hast thou done during thy life?" he was asked. And he answered with bowed head: "All my life has been spent in hard work. I had to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow to provide for my wife and children, —and therefore I had no time to say my prayers properly". "But he always looked enviously towards his neighbour, the Talmud scholar, sighing and full of humility", intervened the celestial counsel. And behold! a divine voice cried aloud: "Bring the workman into Paradise".

Once Besht was asked, "What is the essence of service? Our parents used to tell us that in ancient times pious men did penance. You have abolished this thing, saying: every one who fasts, will some day have to give an account for it to God. For the man who does penance for his soul, will be called a sinner. Why now explain to us, what is the essence of service?". And Besht answered them: "I have come into this world to show a way, that man shall make the observance of three rules his aim in life, namely: Love of God, love of Israel and love of Torah, and with these penance is unnecessary".

A man whose rules of life consisted of love of God, love of the people and love of Torah surely was a good teacher of his people.

And indeed Besht was a teacher unto his people. He gave them a God of love and mercy, freed them from fasting and penance, weeping and lamentations, sorrow and distress.

According to tradition, at the moment of Besht's death both clocks in his room stopped.

Besht died in the year 1760.

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II.

**RABBI BAER OF MESERITZ**

(THE SUCCESSOR TO BESHT).



## RABBI BAER OF MESERITZ

(THE SUCCESSOR TO BESHT)

**R**ABBI Israel Baal-Shem died in the year 1760 and his successor was the well-known Cabbalist and Talmud-Scholar, Rabbi Baer. Rabbi Baer was born in the year 1710 in the village of Lukatsh, in the Province of Volhynia, about ten years after Besht was born. Rabbi Baer's father, Rabbi Abraham, was a poor teacher who did not have the means for the education of his exceptionally gifted son.

The Rabbi of the village at that time was struck by the cleverness of the lad and took him into his Yeshibah (high school for Talmudic study) and taught him the Torah.

The boy made great progress and astonished his teacher by his learning. Before long the little village school was no longer able to teach him anything. It became necessary for him to be among learned men, under more erudite teachers. The Rabbi realised that, and he decided to send him to the big Yeshibah at Lemberg.

Rabbi Baer studied at Lemberg for a number of years and completed there his knowledge of the Talmud.

On his return home, he married in the town of Torshin. As he had no special occupation he became a teacher in a little village not far from the town, and taught Torah to the Jewish children. Rabbi Baer, as his master Besht had done, tried to know the

children of the people rather than the people themselves; like Besht he became familiar in his youth with nature and with country life; like Besht he soon left the noise of the town for rural solitude.

In the lap of nature he was able to concentrate on the study of the Cabbala which in his case was chiefly the Lurian Cabbala. To this doctrine he was devoted body and soul. He began to mortify himself. About seven or eight times he kept the unbroken fast, a fast extending over several days.

The doctrine of Luria taught that it was necessary to "root out Evil", and "to kill carnal desires". Only thus shall Evil lose its sway."

At this time there was living in a lonely village in the Carpathians, he who was destined to become the teacher of Rabbi Baer: Israel Besht. Besht had by then found his God and the right way of divine worship. He knew already that it was possible to lessen the power of Evil, and to serve God with one's bad instincts, too, and that penance and contempt for earthly desires hinder the perfection of man in real worship.

Rabbi Baer left his village and became a teacher in the town of Torshin. He remained there only a short while. He was called first as preacher to Koritz, and then to Dubno. He wandered through the towns of Volhynia and Podolia and preached from the pulpits of the prayer-houses. To a man of his feelings, preaching was the finest task. He spoke with enthusiasm to the big gatherings who came to hear him and they were moved by his words. His preaching was a source of great satisfaction to R. Baer, for by this means he was enabled to come into contact with the people whose teacher and leader he was to become.

Penance and fasting had their effect on him. Rabbi Baer fell ill. At that time, the Hassidism of Besht had won a high position among the Jews of the Ukraine. The renown of Besht as a miracle-worker and a miraculous healer had spread. His sayings,

which were directed against penance, fasting and sadness were passed from mouth to mouth. Rabbi Baer who came to hear of these sayings, rejected them, as was natural for so enthusiastic a follower of the Lurian Cabbala.

When his friends advised him to go to the miracle-worker, to Besht, to be cured of his sickness, Rabbi Baer resisted their advice. But his health becoming worse, he at last yielded, and paid a visit to Besht.

According to another account, Rabbi Baer went to Besht not only because he was ill, but because he wished to hear Besht's doctrine from Besht himself.

From that time onward Rabbi Baer remained with Besht and became his devoted follower. Besht was delighted with his new disciple. It is possible, that he had already heard him preach and had realised that he would be the right man to succeed him. "I have been longing for him for many years", said Besht.

Besht was always very good to his disciple and prepared him for his future career. Rabbi Baer relates the following: "He taught me the language of the birds and of the trees. He revealed to me the secrets of the saints and the magic spells. He led me into the book "Meeine hachachmah," and explained every letter to me." "In the book 'Raziel', he showed me the writing of the angels, and explained to me that certain letters of the alphabet corresponded to the angels, according to the significance of each angel and of his origin, in this or in the next world."

Those near to them knew indeed during the lifetime of Besht, that Rabbi Baer was in the future to be at the head of Hassidism.

And so it was. Everyone agreed that he was worthy of the succession. Not only the mass of the Hassidim, but also his colleagues said, "that to him were accessible the same sources of wisdom from which Besht drew his knowledge."

Rabbi Baer ascended the throne of Besht, but he did not want to stay in Medziboz, in the town

where his master had lived and died. It was, of course an unpleasant thing for him to live near the children of Besht. Therefore, the "Preacher" chose Meseritz as his place of abode. The noted Cabbalist R. Jacob Koppel, the author of the book "Sharre gan Eden" had once lived there. His spirit still hovered over the little village. Besides, Meseritz lay close to Lithuania; it was also near Poland and Volhynia, and so it became the "holy town" to the Hassidim. Rabbi Jacob Joseph, a colleague of Rabbi Baer, said concerning this: "After the death of Besht, the Shechina moved with scrip and staff from Medziboz and chose Meseritz as its abode."

The eyes of the Hassidim fixed formerly on Medziboz, were now turned to Meseritz.

Rabbi Baer made an essential change in the organisation of Hassidism. He did not himself wander about from place to place, as Besht had done. Instead he sent out travelling preachers whose purpose was to win souls for Hassidism.

The Jewish people were the first to send out missionaries to spread their faith.

Hundreds of years before Christ, they went about preaching in all places the principles of Judaism.

"They compassed land and sea to make one convert", said Paul of them. Christianity took its lesson in this respect from Judaism. In travelling about in various countries in order to spread the mission of Christianity, Paul showed himself a real Pharisee.

Under the oppression of the dispersion, the Jewish people naturally gave up their missionary activity. They were glad enough to be allowed to practise their religion themselves without hindrance. Sabbatianism brought back missionary-work among the Jews, its "Apostles" seeking to spread its ideas as itinerant preachers in all the countries they were able to reach. The Lurian Cabbala too had its missionaries. And Rabbi Baer also sent out Hassidic preachers.

The philosopher Salomon Maimon (born 1754 in Lithuania, died 1800) tells the following story about a Hassidic missionary whom he had known personally: "He was a young man, about twenty-two years of age, very weak, very pale and thin. There was something terrible in his appearance, something which demanded obedience to his will, and which enabled him to rule the people with a despotic sway.

Wherever he came, his first question was with regard to the organisation of the community; he abolished what he did not like, and made new arrangements, everything being carried out exactly as he ordered. The oldest members of the community, venerable men, who surpassed him in erudition, trembled before him. A great scholar, who refused to believe in his infallibility was so terrified by the look that he threw at him, that he was taken with a high fever and died soon after."

A well-directed propaganda succeeds. "Young people," Salomon Maimon states, "left their parents, their wives and children and in crowds went to the "Preacher of Meseritz" to hear his teaching from his own lips."

Two of the disciples of Rabbi Baer, Rabbi Asriel and Rabbi Israel of Polotzk contributed a great deal to this success. "They wandered from village to village, and from town to town, and everywhere they sought out a man with 'a heart of flesh' and then they endeavoured to turn him to God and induced him to go to Meseritz."

There are folk-tales about the wanderings and preachings of these two disciples: "On all their journeys" they tell us, "Rabbi Asriel led the horses, while Rabbi Israel was plunged in contemplation. Everywhere they came, Rabbi Israel led the prayers, because he prayed from the depths of his heart, and his beautiful voice captivated all hearers and decided them to give up their worldly pursuits and to be converted to the Creator of all worlds. Thus they performed great deeds and roused the spirit of their many hearers."

Another disciple of Rabbi Baer, Rabbi "Aaron the Great" of Karlin, accomplished a great deal for Hassidism in Lithuania. He was one of the chief founders of the secret Hassidic community there.

He flung out a net which spread from Karlin all over Lithuania, and won many souls to Hassidism.

Many famous disciples gathered about Rabbi Baer. If we may believe the Hassidic account, their number was about three hundred, but only 39 of them are known men who made names for themselves in the history of Hassidism.

The disciples were devoted to their master. They left their homes to spend all their time in his company. The word of the "Preacher" was law unto them, his doctrine was a true manifestation. Everything they had known and done before they had accepted him as their master became nought to them. Rabbi Israel of Koritz says: "Before I went for the first time to the preacher of Meseritz I had studied in eight hundred Cabbalist books, but when I found myself in the company of the holy preacher, I realised that I had learned nothing."

The disciples found hidden meanings not only in the words of the "Preacher" but even in every one of his physical movements. His simplest action was to them the signification of sublime and symbolic deeds.

One of the "saints" of that time, Rabbi Loeb Sorahs, used to say that he would go to the "Preacher", "to see how he put on his shoes."

The countenance of the Rabbi was to them radiant with the glory of the Shechina.

Rabbi Levi Yizchock of Berdishev relates the following about the "Preacher": "Once, during the evening prayer, on the New Year I saw a halo round his head. I grew afraid and I trembled all over. Some who were with me, and did not understand the reason for my fear, took hold of me so that I should not fall. But my master who saw what had happened turned his face to the wall, and leaned against it for some

time. When he looked round again, there was nothing about his head. There was a second time that I saw the halo upon his head — at the hour of his death. Then it was granted to me to understand his doctrine.”

And Rabbi Shneur Salomon of Ladis says: “When our master spoke, the Shechina was speaking through his lips and the spirit of God in him, and he was entirely lost to this world.”

Meseritz became the centre of Hassidism. Hassidim streamed into the town from numerous towns, to greet the “Preacher,” Rabbi Baer. But he was always ill, and he received his pilgrims one day only each week, on the Sabbath, when he partook of the ‘festive meal’ with them. On weekdays he remained in his room with his disciples.

Salomon Maimon gives us an idea of what these Sabbath pilgrimages to Rabbi Baer were like. “I came to the ‘festive meal’ on the Sabbath,” he writes, “and I found a great number of worthy men there, who had come from various places. At last the great man appeared, his venerable form clad in white satin. Even his boots and his snuff-box were white, (white is the colour of grace to the Cabbalist). He gave everyone there his Shalom; he welcomed him. All sat down at table, and during the meal a solemn stillness reigned. After the meal, the superior sang the Sabbath song and each of us had to say a verse from the Holy Scripture. And everyone said his verse. Then the superior preached, and the text of his sermon was the aforesaid verses, which had been taken at random from various places in the Holy Scripture, verses with no connection with each other. But he worked them together with such skill that it seemed as if they had been one whole, and what was still more strange, each of the guests felt that there was something in the sermon which fitted his own case exactly.

“This astonished us greatly. ‘Only a man of comprehensive reason, and great knowledge can pronounce

words, which correspond with everyone's views', said Rabbi Baer in the circle of his Hassidim."

Under his influence the number of Hassidim increased in other countries beyond Volhynia and Podolia, especially in Lithuania, towards whose conversion to Hassidism the "Preacher" exerted all his efforts. Even in Vilna, the stronghold of the Mithnagdim a secret community was formed by the Hassidim. This was indeed a great victory. Young Hassidism won the hearts of thousands of Jews.

Rabbi Baer and his friends were able to watch with satisfaction the development of the movement.

For a number of years Hassidism prospered under Rabbi Baer's guidance and made great progress. In Volhynia and Podolia, he conquered the communities and all the Jewish institutions. Hassidic teaching became gradually known in non-Hassidic circles, and it evoked the anger of the Rabbis and the scholars of Lithuania, notably of the great Gaon Elia of Vilna, who was the chief of the Mithnagdim there.

They cried out in the bitterness of their hearts: "Even in the mouths of fools the words become habitual: 'in every place and in every thing there is complete Divinity'."

In Nisan 1772 began the struggle between the Hassidim and the Mithnagdim. The Gaon Elia and his friends issued the first excommunication against the Hassidim.

In all the towns of Lithuania the ban was made known. And everywhere the Mithnagdim acted according to the spirit of the excommunication.

The long enfeebled health of Rabbi Baer was severely affected by all this, and the Hassidim became full of anxiety for him and for the future of Hassidism.

They saw that the sun which had lighted up Hassidism was now near its setting.

Shortly before his death, Rabbi Baer went to live in Anapoli. There he died in the year 1772, on the 19th of Kislev. A modest tombstone with a eulogistic inscription adorns his place of rest.

III.

**RABBI JACOB JOSEPH OF POLONA.**



## RABBI JACOB JOSEPH OF POLONA.

### I.

**R**ABBI Jacob Joseph ha-Kohen, the Apostle of Hasidism was a descendant of the Cabbalist family of Rabbi Simon of Ostropol and of the well-known Rabbi Yomtob Lippman Heller. The Rabbinical erudition and the Cabbala in which they had so distinguished themselves, and the circle in which he had been brought up, had a great influence upon him. In his youth, he had not been able to criticise his erudite ancestors and to distinguish between them, nor could he single out one to prefer above the other, but as he grew older and his character developed, he showed great inclination for the Cabbala, especially for the Cabbala of Ari. He grew gradually to hold the opinion, that the visible perceptible doctrine is the body—and the Cabbala is its soul.

Very early Rabbi Jacob Joseph became celebrated as a scholar, and he was called as Rabbi to Sharavrod in Volhynia. It was the time when the name of Besht was making itself heard in those parts. Tales were being told about him, of the things he said and did, which were at variance with the ways of the Rabbis of the time, and these became his embittered antagonists, looking upon all concerning the Besht with suspicion. Rabbi Jacob Joseph was among them. Besht came several times to Sharavrod, but Rabbi Jacob Joseph would not see him and he even tried to discourage the people of his town from seeing him. Besht on the contrary, tried hard to win the heart of this

Rabbi, or as the Hassidim used to say, he saw, "that it was necessary to preserve him."

"Once", says Hassidic folk-lore, "Besht came to Sharavrod, and standing in the market place, he told parables to the people, and many of them crowded round him, to listen to his words. It was the Sabbath morning. Rabbi Jacob Joseph came into his synagogue to pray with his congregation, but to his astonishment he found no one there except the beadle, who told him that the people were all in the market-place, listening to the stories of Besht. The Rabbi took this very much to heart, and greatly impressed, he invited Besht to his house as his guest. And from this time forth, he became Besht's disciple and friend, and visited him often. The people of Sharavrod did not know of his visits to Besht. Rabbi Jacob Joseph feared to tell them of his friendship, because most of them were against Besht. And indeed when it came out that their Rabbi had become a "Hassid", he was banished from the town.

Rabbi Jacob Joseph became Rabbi in Rashkov, later in Nemirov, and finally in Polona. He preached Hassidism openly now, although he was still under the influence of the Cabbala of Luria, and mortified himself by fasting. At that time he said the following ; "He who wants to live must fast and die, for rigid discipline is essential to human life."

Besht blamed him for his way of living and wrote him the following letter : "I received your letter, and noticed the first lines, where you write that it is necessary to mortify the flesh ; thereupon my body trembled. And I conjure you by the decree of the guardian of heaven and by the unity of the Holy One, praised be His name ! and by His Shechina, do not run such a risk, for this is the work of sadness and dejection. Do not forget that not by misery but only by enjoyment of the commandments will the Shechina stay with us. You know it yourself, for I have often told you so and you have understood my words".

Finally Rabbi Jacob Joseph became an ardent follower of Besht. And Besht thoroughly understood the soul of his disciple, whose great desire was only to do good for Hassidism. When Rabbi Jacob Joseph once wanted to go to Palestine to live there in seclusion, Besht strove to dissuade him; he knew that an intellectual power such as he was sorely needed by the young Hassidic movement. In a letter to his brother-in-law, Rabbi Gershon, Besht writes the following concerning Rabbi Jacob Joseph: "All his works are pleasing to the Creator, praised be His name! and all his doings are in the name of God." And Rabbi Baer of Meseritz, the friend of Rabbi Jacob Joseph, says of him: "Elija appeared to him, and he accomplished many great things."

Nevertheless it was not he, who was chosen to be chief and leader of the Hassidim after the death of Besht, but Rabbi Baer, because Rabbi Jacob Joseph was above all a man of book-learning, and he lacked the capacity of a leader. Also he was a pedant and if there were any small thing which was not done as he wished, he would fly into a rage. Legend describes him as a man with a very restless face; his heavy drooping eye-lashes covered his eyes, and if he raised them to look at one, one almost fled from him. Such a man could not stand at the head of a young movement such as Hassidism,—which had two functions: a negative, to break down the old Rabbinical fortress, and a positive,—that of reconstruction—the cultivation of Hassidism. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to find a man with powers of organisation, a friendly and sociable man, a man whose speech would attract the people. All these qualities were found in a marked degree in Rabbi Baer. Rabbi Jacob Joseph himself recognised in his friend Rabbi Baer a fitting "leader" for Hassidism.

Whilst Rabbi Baer as "leader" contributed much to the prosperity of Hassidism, through his gift of oratory and his talent for organisation—his friend

Rabbi Jacob Joseph fortified Hassidism by means of his great literary talent. He wrote down the words of his master, the Besht, and studied them carefully in order to be able to explain them clearly. He strove that not one word, not one thought of his master should be lost. A Hassidic legend given in the name of Rabbi Taba of Ostrog, a pupil of Rabbi Baer, says that when Rabbi Jacob Joseph explained the words of Besht to him, "his mouth was as a lighted torch and flames of fire were around him, and he spoke the words as they had been pronounced on Mount Sinai, with fear and trembling."

Thus the two friends, Rabbi Baer, and Rabbi Jacob Joseph worked, each in his own way, for the welfare of Hassidism, and whilst Rabbi Baer as the leader of Hassidism, was the better-known, and all attacks by the Rabbis were directed chiefly against him, — no one knew much of Rabbi Jacob Joseph, who was sitting absorbed in his room and was forging strong weapons against the Mithnagdim. The Mithnagdim did not suspect that in an obscure corner sharp weapons were being prepared against them, and that they, who had hitherto been the persecutors, were soon to become the persecuted.

Hassidism felt that its position was in danger, that its existence was not yet secure, for the dread persecution by the Rabbis and the Mithnagdim headed by the Vilna Gaon had already begun. Soon after the death of its leader Rabbi Baer, Hassidism fell into sore distress.

The enemies of Hassidism saw in the death of Rabbi Baer the finger of God. They were filled with rejoicing. They thought that with the death of Rabbi Baer, Hassidism too would die.

But they were wrong. For Rabbi Jacob Joseph was alive. And he saved Hassidism. He laid the foundation stone of Hassidic literature. He was the first Hassidic writer. And the weapons which he was forging against the Mithnagdim were powerful weapons

and they served their purpose, He did not abuse, did not curse : he neither denounced nor condemned. He never persecuted his adversaries. He persecuted and ill-treated no one. He only revealed to the people the real character of the Rabbis who then stood at the head of the Mithnagdim. He exposed their way of leading the people who followed their teachers in blind credulity — and with one blow he smashed down their altars. He feared neither the Rabbis nor their anathema. He did not cringe to them nor did he take an oath that he had kept all the commandments as Rabbi Mendel and his people did. He did not make a pilgrimage to the “Kanosssa” of the Vilna Gaon to beseech his mercy. No, he declared war on the Rabbis, openly and boldly.

## II.

Rabbi Jacob Joseph used to say : “An efficient physician who loves his fellow-men and really seeks to cure them, must first lance the wounds and then proceed to heal them ; the spiritual leader must act likewise if he desires to show the people the right way : He who strives to fulfil the commandment expressed in the words : ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’ must first open the wounds made by his sins so that he may be able to absorb the remedy.”

So Rabbi Jacob Joseph lanced the “wounds” of the people before he began to teach them the Hasidism of Besht. He first destroyed the former conception of sanctity, he shattered the old idols, and did not privilege any of them. With harsh words he censured the leaders of his time and of former times, the Rabbis, the teachers and the communal leaders. It is with grief that he writes : “With our own eyes we see the indescribable conduct of the Rabbis and leaders, whose task it is to provide for the community.”

The greatest evil which he found in his generation was the “number of leaders”. Everyone sought to be leader or chief.

He has left us a picture of the contemporary Rabbis. "Small dangerous foxes, such are the Rabbis, who have been struggling for money from their earliest youth. They travel through the countries to inquire into the condition of the inhabitants, and consider it right to accept presents from them — 'rewards for idleness', which are taken from the earnings of other people. And they do worse; they go to receive presents without investigating the condition of the people from whom they receive them."

These Rabbis, whose sole ambitions are money and pilpul, "pierce one another with their sword-like tongues to show their wit. And everyone rises up and cries out; 'I want to rule, I am the greater scholar'."

Naturally Rabbi Jacob Joseph could not be satisfied with the manner of studying of the Rabbis. He said the following: "The Torah is not meant for study in the usual sense of the word, — but by means of the Torah we can devote ourselves to His high Name, which must be our essential aim;" and "the study of the Torah must only be in His honour, praised be His name! in love and in fear". And if anyone be studying the Torah only for the purpose of making a name for himself in the world, in order to become prominent and well-known, — it is a sure reason for failure."

He was a great opponent of the sophistries and the Pilpul of the contemporary Rabbis. "The Rabbis", said Rabbi Jacob Joseph, — "have the bad habit of showing off on the Sabbath before Passover and on the Sabbath of Repentance all their many sophistries, instead of teaching the people how to sanctify themselves in order to worship Him praised be He! They parade their wisdom and their erudition before the congregation."

### III.

Rabbi Jacob Joseph believed, as his master Baal-Shem believed, that the object of the creation of man

in this world, was solely to enable him to prepare himself for the next world, and that "the aim of a man is to be the 'Temple of God'." And to the question, "how can a man attain to such a height?", he answered as his master Baal-Shem used to answer: "Your final aim—devotion to God." But what is the meaning of this devotion to God? "Faith, that is devotion to God, praised be He"; only by this devotion, through faith, is a man able to acquire a noble soul. But, such a devotion, "can be achieved only by the subduing of carnal desires." "The soul is always clinging to its Creator, but the flesh hinders devotion, surrender"—

The subduing of the flesh, must not be achieved by penances, nor by the mortification of carnal desires. "The meaning of the creation of man is the fulfilment of the commandment of the Torah. We must live through them and not die."

"Through fastings and penance man becomes sad, and this affects devotion to God, which can only be achieved by joy."

The overcoming of the material which Rabbi Jacob Joseph demanded was to change the material into the spiritual, to transform it into something holy. "Even if you are engaged in worldly affairs your innermost thoughts must be the Torah." "Only ordinary people think that they can serve God solely by prayers and Torah. In reality it is not so; for there is a meaning in spiritual things; in the Torah, prayers, and in the keeping of the commandments, which all revolve around one pole: to purify the fallen sparks; there is, the same meaning in earthly things, in eating, drinking and in all kinds of work."

Rabbi Jacob Joseph saw only the spiritual, the inner things. He declared the following: that the "clothing", the visible part of the Torah, is to be called the "Torah of the people", and the internal, the spiritual and hidden part of it is the "Torah of God." He judged the commandments and the keeping of them

not from their visible form ; but from their spiritual meaning. "At the time of the Messiah, the commandments will be abolished," say the masters of the Talmud, "for the commandments will not continue any more in their earthly form, but only the spiritual meaning will be preserved." "Even now, in our days, if there should be a very worthy man, he would be released from the earthly commandments."

"The whole Torah and the commandments are only means through which we can rise to a high mental state : the state of love." "For the essence and the aim of the whole Torah is love to God and devotion to Him."

#### IV.

These and similar thoughts, Rabbi Jacob Joseph wrote down in his book "Toldoth Jacob Joseph" which he had published in Medsiboz in the "holy town" of Hassidism, by a Hassidic publishing house without any introduction from the Rabbinic side — a fact which was in itself sufficient to call up feelings of vengeance in the hearts of the scholars.

This was the first book in Hassidic literature. Rabbi Jacob Joseph pleads in it openly for Hassidism. At the same time he condemns Rabbinism, heaping shame upon the Rabbis and the scholars.

No wonder that the book evoked tremendous indignation among the Mithnagdim.

The Rabbis and the scholars were not only offended by the words which had been written against them in the book. Although they were not mentioned by name, each of them recognised himself there. Much more they realised that Hassidism from being persecuted had now become a persecutor.

In addition they found in the book many utterances in which they perceived the destruction and denial of Judaism and they looked upon Rabbi Jacob Joseph as a more dangerous enemy even than Rabbi Baer himself. The words of Rabbi Jacob Joseph : "A man

must not accustom himself to passing all his time in study," were enough for them to see him undermining the roots of Judaism. And they observed with pain that the book made a great stir for Hassidism and caused much opposition to Rabbinism. Thousands of people near and far read these words which reached them in all places where the scattered seed of Israel had settled.

If Hassidism had hitherto been something "hidden," and the teaching of the Zaddikim had been known only to some chosen few, it now became known and accessible to everyone by means of this book. And Besht, who had hitherto been known only as a Miracle worker who had healed by means of magic, through this book in which his name was mentioned by the author eighty-two times under the title : "my Master," became known as a celebrated, famous man who stood for noble thoughts full of inspiring and edifying teachings.

Rabbi Jacob Joseph speaks in his book a great deal of the sanctity and greatness of Baal-Shem.

"The soul of Besht" — Rabbi Jacob Joseph says in one of his writings, — "was once raised above, and heard there that Michael, the Archangel, the great pleader for Israel, was speaking for Israel : 'All their sins must be laid on the favourable side of the scales.'" (the scales must be balanced in their favour).

And when everyone was astonished at hearing this about Besht and asked : "By whom was Besht taught and how did he come into possession of the secrets of the Torah ?," Rabbi Jacob Joseph explained to them : "Achiya of Shiloh, who received the traditions from Moses our Master, and went out together with him from Egypt, and was afterwards in the court of justice of King David and was the teacher of the prophet Elija, — he was the teacher of 'my Master'."

The book let loose a veritable storm among the Mithnagdim, the Rabbis and the scholars. A pamphlet full of abuse and insults was issued against it. The

book excited in particular the anger of the "Gaon" of Vilna, he who had been enclosed all his life within "the four walls of the Halacha," and who saw in Talmudic study the spiritual happiness of the people. Suddenly he saw a book appear written by a man who had been excommunicated, advocating less study and other such things! He condemned the book to be burned.

In Brody and in some other towns the book was consigned to the flames. Hassidic legend tells of the storm which raged in the "world above," when the Gaon issued his order. The Zaddik Rabbi Heshel of Slotczov came to the highest court and cried out:—"Is it not known to Him who has created the world, that not for his own honour, God forbid, has Rabbi Jacob Joseph written this book, but only for the honour of God and the Torah?"—Then Rabbi Jacob Joseph himself appeared, "and lamented bitterly that they were burning his book." Then a great noise was heard, so that all worlds trembled and there were cries: "Make room!" And Baal-Shem himself came into the hall. "The Master himself came to plead for the book of his disciple."

The Gaon of Vilna was not satisfied with the mere burning of the book. His desire was to make still more severe the ban against Hassidism and the Hassidim.

In order to add force to the Anathema and to ensure unanimity on the part of the people, he selected the time of the great market in the town of Selve in Lithuania where many Rabbis and leaders of the communities met together to discuss various matters. The Gaon and his Rabbinical court availed themselves of this moment to issue the new decree of excommunication which they had drawn up, so that all assembled there might sign it.

And they all signed, for not one of them dared refuse to do what the Vilna Gaon commanded.

On the third Elul, 1781, the new ban was signed, and sent out to the different communities that it might be brought into force.

And all this fear and alarm was caused by the book "Toldoth Jacob Joseph."

Whilst the Mithnagdim received the book of Rabbi Jacob Joseph with anathema and abuse, the Hassidim received it with joy and jubilation.

They discovered in it not only the foundation and the origin of Hassidism, but a shield and a defence.

Rabbi Pinchos of Koritz, a friend of Baal-Shem wrote of the book: "Hitherto there has been no book such as this in the world, because it is the divine Torah".

Indeed, the book was the greatest authority on Hassidism, which still derives its spiritual food from it.

Rabbi Jacob Joseph died in the year 1782 in the town of Polona.

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IV.

**TWO HASSIDIC ENTHUSIASTS :**

- 1) RABBI NACHUM OF TCHERNOBYL.
- 2) RABBI LEVI YITZHOK OF BERDITCHEV.



## TWO HASSIDIC ENTHUSIASTS.

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### I.

#### RABBI NACHUM OF TCHERNOBYL.

**T**HE poetry of Hassidism, namely, the mysticism in it, arose in the Ukraine and from there it spread to other countries. Thus the Ukraine became the cradle of Hassidism. There Besht lived, and there he attained the position which he held. Throughout this country, through its towns and villages, the master wandered and proclaimed his doctrines. There his "followers" lived: Rabbi Baer, and also the apostle of Hassidism, Rabbi Jacob Joseph Hakohen.

Further, the two disciples of Rabbi Baer: Rabbi Nachum of Tchernobyl, and Rabbi Levi Yitzhok of Berditchev, who were at that time at the head of the movement, contributed much to the development of Ukrainian Hassidism and to the strengthening of its mystical elements.

They were both possessed of strong feeling and a vivid imagination. Both were entirely absorbed in their ideal, and both understood how to inspire the Jews of the Ukraine, who esteemed them greatly—they both passionately loved the object they had at heart.

Rabbi Nachum of Tchernobyl, who was known as a "scholar" and a Cabbalist of the Lurian school, gave up his study soon after his acquaintance with Besht. He, who had the good fortune to meet Besht

twice and on whom Besht impressed his words, became devoted body and soul to Hassidism. He was honesty and modesty personified. The most necessary was enough for him, and he was satisfied with everything. He saw only the good in the world. The words of his master, that Evil does not exist, were always before his eyes: "Evil is only a throne for Good" and Rabbi Nachum himself also used to say: "In everything there is always something Good."

And this pious man was forever travelling. He went from town to town, from village to village, and he tried to arouse the people. He stirred up their sleepy souls, and their suffering minds. He travelled in a simple peasant's cart, and in every place to which he came he preached. He used to look for the simplest, the most uneducated people, for the sinners and for poor wretches, he used to speak to them and his wish was to turn their hearts to God.

He never tired of his work, nor did he allow himself to be depressed by any unpleasantness which might happen to him on his way, nor by the disputes with the Mithnagdim.

The Mithnagdim behaved abominably to Rabbi Nachum. They abused him horribly, but he did not take any notice of them, and never answered them, but continued his work with the greatest calm. Once — so relates the legend — he came to a town where many Mithnagdim lived. He went as usual to preach in the synagogue and when they saw him standing by the Ark, they began to abuse and insult him, and dragged him down from the Ark, and beat him terribly. Calmly and uncomplainingly he left that synagogue and went to another place to teach the people.

He never told the people to go to the places of study to learn the wisdom of the Rabbis. He knew only too well the ways of many of his contemporaries among the Talmud-scholars "who," as he says, "are extremely wise, but are very far from being truly pious."

The power of Evil still holds full sway over them, and has not slackened its hold in the slightest."

Further he did not teach the people to give up their business, and to lead a life of sacrifice and penance, as the Lurian Cabbala asked them to do, and as he, Rabbi Nachum himself, had done before he became one of the followers of Besht. His ideal was now to awaken in the people the highest and the noblest feelings—love of God. He taught the principles of Hassidism: Beware of renouncing the good things of this life. You must transact your business,, you must work, eat and drink, enjoy the sunshine and rejoice in the splendour of everything. But you must feel also in the depth of your soul the spirit of God, which lives within everything. All your being must be ruled by one feeling, piety, by God. And you and everything which happens through you—are one thing. The whole world, with all its lives and its doings, forms one harmony, one secret divine power. Everything is the manifestation of the divinity, and when you have reached this knowledge you will find the way to God through your earthly inclinations. For vulgarity, malevolence do not exist at all in the world. Everything is good and holy, "Everything is God."

Rabbi Nachum not only preached, he also acted. The money he collected in various places he used to give away to buy trousseaux for poor brides. He also looked after prisoners and he often gave all his money away to ransom them. At this time the position of the Jewish people in Russia was very bad; many of them were imprisoned without reason, and Rabbi Nachum was as a guardian angel to them.

Rabbi Nachum died in the year 1797, at the age of sixty-seven, beloved and adored by all the Hassidic people of the Ukraine. His grave in Tchernobyl is considered holy to our day.

He left one book "Mehore Heineim," which is a foundation of Hassidic literature.

## II.

## RABBI LEVI YITZHOK OF BERDITCHEV.

**S**IMILAR to Rabbi Nachum, but inspired with still greater enthusiasm, was Rabbi Levi Yitzhok of Berditchev [1740-1809].

He did not travel as his contemporary did, yet he sowed the seeds of Hassidism everywhere, and exerted a considerable influence from his own place of abode. From every village in the vicinity, the people came on business matters to the town of Berditchev (in the district of Kiev), which was a centre of trade and industry, and there they saw the marvellous man and listened eagerly to his doctrine, and to his ecstatic prayers, and every one of them returned home an enthusiastic Hassid. "And there was not one of his adversaries," so the people said in the simplicity of their hearts "who was not converted to Hassidism, as soon as he had heard the prayers of Rabbi Levi Yitzhok."

He was a man of great feeling, a real Mystic. According to folk-lore, "he was lighted up by the divine flame." He always felt that he was in the society of his Creator, with whom he used to speak his heart's desire, as one human being speaks to another, at one time in prayer, at another, grumblingly, and sometimes in very earnest appeal. He never did this for his own needs, but only for the needs of his people, whom he loved above everything, and for whom he was ready to sacrifice his own life.

In the whole of the Judaism of the Exile we hardly find another who distinguished himself by such vehement love for the Jews and Judaism. Nowhere do we hear such words, which rise from the depth of the heart, and in which we see so ardent a longing, such an assimilation of the soul to God and Israel, as these which came from the lips of Rabbi Levi Yitzhok. This love took its root in glowing inspiration, in the feelings, devoid of all cunning and affectation. He

not know any philosophising about Judaism and about the Jewish people. Wherever we have to philosophise, we also doubt. And Rabbi Levi Yitzhok could not be in doubt about anything that concerned Judaism and the Jews. He and they were as if united in one soul. They were his life, if not more. At all times he thought or spoke about them, for he was all heart, all feeling, all love, pure sublime love—love of God and of Israel. (And his love of Israel exceeded all bounds. He loved his people more than anything else; they were dear to him as his life. He loved them much more than his God.) For his people, he was ready to let God come down from his throne. "Lord," Rabbi Levi Yitzhok once cried out, "if ever Thou shouldst issue a hard decree against the Jews, we Zaddikim, will not fulfil Thy commands." He never saw any wrong in the Jews; for him they were innocent and without any dark side.

"We dare not let one wicked word fall about the Jews, but we must always try to plead for them."

Israel is the highest of all things, it is holy and pure, elevated above everything; "Israel the holy people is higher than all the world."

And because of this belief he was led to argue with God, and he always found that his people were in the right, and not God. "One day," relates folklore, "Rabbi Levi Yitzhok noticed, while on his journey, that his Jewish coachman was saying his morning prayers and oiling the wheels of the coach at the same time. A great inspiration flooded his heart at the sight of this, and he cried out aloud: 'Lord of the world, behold how much Thy people love Thee and serve Thee. Even when oiling cart-wheels they do not forget Thee. And Thou darest to complain against Israel.'"

"The Defender of Israel," such was the name which the Hassidim of the Ukraine invented for him. In every generation, so Hassidism says, Israel has a defender in this world just as he has one in the next world,

namely the angel Michael. These two defences, the heavenly and the earthly, always go hand in hand. But it is not granted to every generation to perceive its defender and his intercessions with its mortal minds. The defender is usually one of those thirty-six unknown Zaddikim, who live in every generation and who build up the secret pillars of the world. Rabbi Levi Yitzhok was a public defender and he fulfilled his mission gloriously.

For him, Israel was the centre of all creation ; he saw in him the favourite of God, for "everything that God has created till now, and in our days, He has done only for his favourite Israel." "All the worlds above and below, He has created only for Israel." Israel stands to God in the same position as a favourite child to his father."

Everything that the son wishes, the father does. "God reigns over the world according to the desires of Israel."

And the whole life of Rabbi Levi Yitzhok was nothing but anxiety and mental torment. He had deep wounds in his soul, and his great heart was always bleeding.

He suffered very much. But never for his personal troubles. He was constantly connected with God and with his people. He merged completely with them, and he suffered the sorrows of the people.

Emotional Judaism created the mysterious trinity : God, the Torah and Israel are one. According to this mystery, Israel was never alone, but always in inseparable unity with God and with Judaism. And for the sake of this trinity, Rabbi Levi Yitzhok suffered all his life.

He saw his people in Exile, despised and persecuted on every side, he saw his people standing on high, and above everything, and subjected at every step to torment, and his glowing heart sank within him. . .

But in these sufferings, he could still find consolation. The people is worthy of a high fate. Israel suffers for Judaism and for God.

And how dear are such sufferings ; "how dear and agreeable all these tortures and blows are to me. Through them the name of God is made holy and is celebrated." But he cannot be consoled, because the spirit of Israel was also banished: Israel in Exile, Judaism in Exile, God in Exile. Israel lost its country, and God wandered to the foreign countries with her. "Here in Exile, God Himself is in Exile."

And Rabbi Levi Yitzhok hoped that the ideal would be embodied in every human being. "A time will come when all people shall crown God as their only ruler. Then all evil will disappear from the world, and no more crime will be committed. This is the day of the Messiah."

And then this great day, this day of the Messiah, will be the final day of deliverance, a deliverance for Judaism, for Israel, and for God. And on this great day of the Messiah the Jews will return to their country, to the country of their fathers.

For only there, in the country of Israel, can absolute deliverance be, only there in the country of their fathers, "which is high in the holy spirit" and in the "great Reason," is it possible for God to ascend.

And then Israel shall attain to the highest step, which the angels have not yet reached. Then Israel will be omniscient, and the angels will ask Israel: "What is God doing?"

Rabbi Levi Yitzhok looked forward to such a great day. Every day and every hour, he was waiting for the Messiah. He was convinced, and imbued with this deep belief, that in a short time, in a very short time, the One longed-for would appear, and then there would be an end to all the sufferings of Israel, of Judaism and of God.

And on the eve of the 9th Ab, so relates Hassidism, at twilight, when the Jews were already assembled to lament over the ruin of their country, at this bitter hour, Rabbi Levi Yitzhok stood in his dark cell and looked through the window. He was filled with enthusiasm

and with a burning heat. He looked out into the distance, into far eternity. He was waiting for someone. From time to time he bent his ear to listen for footsteps — perhaps, he is coming from afar, perhaps he is already in the next street. He was waiting for the Messiah.

“The day of the destruction, the day of the great national affliction, the ninth day of Ab,” relates a Talmud legend, “shall be transformed one day into a day of joy, the day of the Messiah,” and the faithful Rabbi Levi Yitzhok was expecting his coming more than ever before, on this day of the 9th of Ab.

The evening shadows disappeared, and the Jews were waiting in the synagogue for the Rabbi, but he stood at the window lost in thought, expectant. The servant came and whispered in his ear: “Rabbi, it is time to begin reading the Lamentations, the people are sitting on the floor and waiting.”

The words entered into his great heart like a thunderclap. He awoke from his thoughts and looked around him: “How frightful, how terrible is reality: the Jews in Exile, Judaism in Exile, God in Exile. And he is not here. . . .”

With a horrible heart-rending cry he rushed into the synagogue, fell to the ground before the “Ark of the Covenant” and lamented bitterly:—“How doth the city sit solitary . . . how is she become as a widow.”

In this way, Ukrainian Hassidism describes its favourite.

Thus these two enthusiasts, Rabbi Nachum and Rabbi Levi Yitzhok, exerted great influence over Hassidism in the Ukraine, and they gave it much—imagination, mystery, feeling.

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V.

**TWO MARVELLOUS MEN :**

- 1) RABBI ABRAHAM "THE ANGEL."
- 2) RABBI LEIB SORAHS.



## TWO MARVELLOUS MEN.

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### I.

#### RABBI ABRAHAM "THE ANGEL."

**I**N the middle of the 18th century two men lived in the Ukraine who had a great influence on *Hassidism*, not because of their learning but because of their personalities. The first was Rabbi Abraham, the son of Rabbi Baer of Meseritz, the successor to "Besht," who was known by the people as "the Angel." The second, no less known, was Rabbi Leib Sorahs.

Rabbi Abraham from his youth led a solitary, peculiar life. He used to eat and sleep only very little, and was always absorbed in study, especially of the *Caballa*. His father, Rabbi Baer, thought of educating his son in the study of the Talmud, and found a teacher for him in the person of his disciple, the well-known Rabbi Shneur Solomon. But dry study alone did not satisfy the mystically inclined soul of Rabbi Abraham, and he sought Caballist hints in every page of the Talmud. When one day Rabbi Shneur Solomon was complaining about his pupil to his father, the latter said: "Let my son go his own way. Explain the Talmud to him as you understand it. and he will interpret it according to his own conception. Show him the Talmud according to the letter, and he will explain its meaning to you according to the spirit."

According to tradition, his method of worship was the following: All day he was wrapped in the prayer shawl (*Talis*), and the philacteries (*Tefillen*) were always round his forehead. His face, too, was wrapped in

the *Talis*, and nobody could see it. And they said of him, he is a holy man, his face is the face of God, and no mortal may look upon him. A grandchild of Rabbi Israel of Risin says of him: "He was a living Angel; his food was the skin of a young dove; a human being could not live on such food." *Hassidism* sought to represent Rabbi Abraham as a human being, who was controlled by nothing but mind, and who suppressed his body and his fleshly desire. When his father tried to persuade him to marry — so they say — he wept bitterly, for how could he humble himself to touch the body of a woman? He consented, however, only in order to fulfil the first Commandment: "Be fruitful and multiply." He overcame his shyness and led home a wife, who presented him with four children, two sons and two daughters. He said concerning this: "Four times I touched my wife, four times I planted a seed."

One *Zaddik* of that time, Rabbi Yitzhok of Radzivilov, desired very much to see and look upon the "Angel." He called on him on the eve of the Fast, the 9th of Ab, and went with him to the synagogue to repeat the Lamentations, the "*Kinot*." Everyone was sitting on the floor, and the leader of the prayers began to lament; then Rabbi Abraham said the first word of the book of Lamentations aloud: "*Ahah!*" hid his head between his knees, and remained calm. The leader had already finished chanting the prayers, the people had left the synagogue, but he still remained seated with his head between his knees and uttered not one word, nor did he move his body. Rabbi Yitzhok, his guest, waited for him till midnight; then he, too, went home. The following morning he returned to the synagogue, and behold, Rabbi Abraham was still sitting in the same position in which he had left him on the previous night. Till the evening Rabbi Abraham continued to sit thus. "Not in vain," Rabbi Yitzhok said afterwards, "did they call him 'Angel'; the name corresponds to his being as well as to his deeds."

The *Zaddik*, Rabbi Baruch of Medsiboz, the grandchild of Besht, who despised all his contemporaries, and uttered the following bold sentence, "I desire to be the prince over all the *Zaddikim*," was, however, obliged to bow his head to Rabbi Abraham the "Angel." Once he went to see the "Great Marvel," but could not resolve to enter the room where the "Angel" was sitting, but remained standing outside and looked at the great man through the window. But when the "Angel" got up from his seat and Rabbi Baruch looked at him, he was so frightened that he ran away.

In Fastow (in the province of Kiev), where he lived at the end of his life, Rabbi Abraham led, as before, a secluded life, almost invariably locked in his room. However, the people had a burning desire to see his face. And as the *Zaddik*, Rabbi Nachum of Tchernobyl, once passed through the little town, they pressed him to persuade the "Angel" to show himself to the people. Rabbi Nachum did his best to dissuade them from their wish, explaining to them the great danger which threatened them if they were to look upon the "Angel" of God. But the desire of all was so great that he was obliged to yield. This was on the day of the feast of the circumcision of the son of one of the inhabitants of the town. The "Angel" was "*Sandik*" and Rabbi Nachum the "*Mohel*." As the circumcision took place in the synagogue all the inhabitants of the town—adults and little children—came in, and a miracle happened: all these people found room enough in the small synagogue. The "Angel" came in, his breast covered with the *Talis*. He sat on the chair to take the child in his arms. Little by little he removed the *Talis* from his form. The people watched him with great impatience—they could not wait calmly—until the face of the holy man was revealed, the face of God that they were to see with their own eyes! How great was the terror of those assembled when the "Angel" showed them his face! They rushed in confusion from the synagogue.

Thus the imagination of the Hassidic people represented Rabbi Abraham the "Angel." And the Hassidim believed, and believe to this day, that Rabbi Abraham was an "Angel" who had but put on a human frame.

The greatest opponent of Rabbi Abraham's ascetic life was his own father. Rabbi Baer often begged his son to give up this way of living, but all his efforts were in vain. "Also after his death," according to tradition, Rabbi Baer appeared to the holy "Angel" and begged him out of filial affection to abandon the way of asceticism, for the life of an ascetic, which led him to attain to the rank of an "Angel," was very dangerous. But the son answered him that he did not recognise an earthly father—he recognised only the father of mercy, the living God.

Although Rabbi Abraham differed from his father in all his habits and also in his manner of Divine worship, he agreed with him in the principles of *Hassidic* doctrine. His *Hassidic* writings, which have been collected under the title of "Chesed l'Abraham," do not show any departure from the *Hassidic* views of Besht. He too saw in the Zaddik the reason, the root, the soul of creation. "The Zaddik," he used to say, "is the basis of the world. Through him the good and the complete comes to this lower world. For no revelation is possible until it is given through the Zaddik."

"The Zaddik brings Divine conceptions to the world," and through him "the whole of a generation is edified," and "everything becomes perfect only through the Zaddik." The essence of Divine service was to him *love of God*, through which all kinds of baser natures are raised up. In this Rabbi Abraham was nearer to Besht than to his father, who considered piety the essence of Divine service. Like Besht and his father, he honoured the "pure way of thinking." "The mind of man is his soul, it is part of the Divine majesty."

Rabbi Abraham died in the year 1777 in Fastow. He was 36 years old. The Zaddik Rabbi Pinchas of Koritz said at that time: "If the "Angel" had not died at such an early age, all the Zaddikim would have become submissive to him."

Over the grave of the "Angel" stands an old cottage. The place is regarded by the people as holy. Whenever any misfortune occurs, they go there to pray at the "Holy Tomb."

## II.

### RABBI LEIB SORAHS.

The life of Rabbi Leib Sorahs was mysterious. The day of his birth is unknown; just as little is known about his origin and his family. His entire biography is made up of folk-lore and traditions collected with the greatest care and the most painful accuracy by the *Hassidim* of the Ukraine.

He very often called on his contemporary, Rabbi Baer of Medsiboz, who could never find words enough to praise him. Rabbi Leib Sorahs held a unique position in *Hassidism*. He never preached didactic sermons, never wrote books, never took an active part in discussions among the *Hassidim*. The *Hassidim* were in the habit of considering him a miracle worker. They knew that he had not come into the world for them, but for the sake of the thirty-six "hidden Zaddikim" of his generation, who had been sent into this world. For in every generation thirty-six "hidden Zaddikim" live, who, according to the doctrine of Jewish mystics, because of the justice of their conduct, are able to prolong the existence of the world. Nobody knows where they live, what they do, or how they act. It is possible that one of the poorest and worst-clothed, an entirely uneducated and unknown beggar in the street to whom you pay no attention, is one of these thirty-six. For they are the "hidden" ones.

And in every generation there is a Zaddik to whom the task of mediating between the hidden and the revealed is allotted. He must also look after their physical welfare. This high task fell to the lot of Rabbi Leib Sorahs.

The Hassidim explained the restless wanderings of the master in this way; he associated personally with every one of the thirty-six hidden Zaddikim, who lived scattered here and there in the world, and he was obliged to wander from one place to the other.

According to tradition, he was often favoured; the distances from place to place were shortened for him (*Kefizath haderuch*), so that he could reach remote places in a very short time. Everywhere he went he opened a shop, which was generally empty. The Jews of the Ukraine still say of a poor shop, "The shop of Rabbi Leib Sorahs." No buyers came to the shop of Leib Sorahs — this was the place where he could receive the hidden Zaddikim. On every market day Rabbi Leib Sorahs was to be seen passing down the street with bowed head, poorly dressed, as if seeking something; he was looking for the thirty-six hidden Zaddikim.

And the Hassidim of the Ukraine regarded him with great respect. They were always afraid to address him, because they knew that he had not come into this world for them. They believed sincerely and firmly that he was a holy man and a great Zaddik in whose hands lay life in this and in the next world.

And the life of Rabbi Leib Sorahs was as a symbol. The Hassidim believe to this day that it is possible to prevent misfortune by pronouncing the name of Rabbi Leib Sorahs three times when it lightens. As his birth and his whole life are a tradition, so also after his death he lives on in the kingdom of tradition.

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VI.

**RABBI SHNEUR SALOMON  
OF LADI.**



## RABBI SHNEUR SALOMON OF LADI.

### I.

**T**HE Hassidism of Lithuania is entirely different from that of the Ukraine. The Hassidim were different and their Master and leader Rabbi Shneur Salomon was different too.

Rabbi Shneur Salomon was born in the year 1746 in the town of Lozna in Lithuania. At the age of twelve, he astonished all by his extraordinary talent and his profound knowledge of the Talmud. They called him the "young Genius". His master said of him: "This youth is no longer my pupil; he is my friend and colleague. He is able to teach the Torah to others."

He married at the age of fifteen and lived in the home of his father-in-law, who looked after him and his family. He himself abandoned the world and became absorbed in the study of the Torah and the Cabbala with such ardour, that many tales were afterwards told of his utter abandonment.

At the age of twenty he heard for the first time the name of the Maggid Rabbi Baer of Meseritz, and he decided to go to him and hear from his own lips the teachings of Hassidism. The Hassidim relate that Rabbi Shneur Salomon stood then at the cross roads; he was to go either to Vilna to the Gaon Elia, the great adversary of Hassidism, or to the source of Hassidism, to Meseritz. He chose the latter — saying: "For the study of Torah I no longer require a teacher. But I need a guide, who will show me how to serve

God, and him I shall find in Meseritz.” Against the wish of his wife and his father-in-law he left his town, took his staff and walked to Meseritz. And as he had not enough money for the journey, — he had only the six roubles which his brother had given him, — he worked on the way as a manual labourer, as a porter, a woodcutter, a water-carrier. He took neither gifts nor help from anyone. Finally, after many days of wandering, he came to Meseritz. Rabbi Baer recognised the value and the intelligence of Rabbi Shneur Salomon, and he was very kind to his new disciple; he taught him the Cabbala and Hassidism. In Meseritz Rabbi Shneur Salomon found that for which his soul had been yearning — and the love which he felt for his Master and his Master’s son, Rabbi Abraham the Angel, with whom he studied the Talmud and the Cabbala, increased daily.

Rabbi Shneur Salomon remained for eighteen months in Meseritz. Then he returned to his wife, as he had promised. But he did not stay long at home. His yearning for his Master and his colleagues was so great that he had to return to Meseritz. Wherever his Master went he went also. Finally he stayed for three years in Meseritz, until his Master died.

Rabbi Baer died during the period of persecution against Hassidism. Rabbi Shneur Salomon who had a thorough knowledge of Talmud and Cabbala, was the best man to fight against the persecutors of Hassidism.

He sought to make peace and he went several times with one of his comrades to Vilna to plead with the chief of the Mithnagdim, the Gaon Elia. But the Gaon closed his doors and would not receive them. The persecution grew more severe. And because of the slanders of the Mithnagdim Rabbi Shneur Salomon was in the month Tishra 1798 thrown into the prison of St. Petersburg. They informed against him, accusing him of being a traitor to his country and a blasphemer.

He remained in prison until the 19th Kislav. On that day he was released. But the Mithnagdim did not cease to slander him. In the year 1800, on the fourth day of Kislav, Rabbi Shneur Salomon was incarcerated for the second time in the prison of St. Petersburg. Again he remained there for a fortnight and he was released.

Rabbi Shneur Salomon was the first Martyr of Hassidism. He defended Hassidism openly, not only in writing, but by word of mouth, in his discourses. And when he came from St. Petersburg, he spoke openly to the Mithnagdim of his Hassidic opinions. He stretched out his hand to them and went among the noted men of the Mithnagdim, to speak to them and to justify Hassidism to them and to emphasise its value.

## II.

Lithuania, the country in which many Talmudic scholars lived, and where Rabbinism exerted full sway, was not a fertile soil for an idea which was based principally on emotion and intuition.

Rabbi Shneur Salomon, the "scholar" who did not give up his "Rabbinism," even after he had become the disciple of Rabbi Baer, conceived Hassidism very differently from Rabbi Nachum of Tchernobyl, Rabbi Levi Yitzhok of Berdishev and many others.

He, the Rabbinical rationalist, had now become the Hassidic rationalist. He founded a Hassidism which he called "Chabad" (Abbreviation for Chachmah, Binah, Daath: Wisdom, Reason, Knowledge), which represents the first three of the Sefiroth (Divine Emanations).

Whilst the Hassidism of the Ukraine has "emotion" as its foundation, the Hassidism of Chabad has "reason" as its foundation; because "the source of all virtues is: Wisdom, reason, knowledge." The essence of the soul is "reason," and from the perception, faith receives its nourishment and its strength." "Morality which is

the result of "reason," is higher than that which is rooted in human nature" and "virtue arising from 'reason' is higher than virtue which is not founded on 'reason'."

Chabad is the philosophy of Hassidism, whilst the Ukrainian perception of Hassidism forms its poetic side.

Lithuanian Hassidism knows few of those "holy stories," of which the Ukraine had so many. The poetic moment, the Ukrainian Hassidic gift of tales and legends, is almost non-existent in Chabad.

And whilst the Hassidism of "emotion" attacked the Rabbinical teachings and regarded them only as a means and not as an end—whilst Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polona, the Nestor among the disciples of Besht, declared expressly that "Man must not be too much absorbed in Talmudic study—prayer is the essential thing,"—a statement by which he sought to form a connection with an utterance of Besht, who once said, that that which he had attained, was not due to his study of the Talmud, but to the prayers which he had always said with great devotion—Chabad could not possibly agree with this, and Rabbi Shneur Salomon commanded: Whilst you are studying the Halacha, you must not interrupt your study for the sake of prayers." He finds in the Halacha the extension and the diffusion of the light of the will of God and the highest Wisdom.

Man must study the Gemara even if the things there have no practical religious value: "even such Halachoth which nobody needs." "The Halachoth which were pronounced by the Tannaim, form the real recognition of Divinity." "For every Halacha is the Wisdom and the will of God." And thus, when a man has really understood the Halacha, he will have perceived the will and the wisdom of God. For the will and the wisdom of God can only be recognised through manifestations, as they are revealed in the Halacha. And Rabbi Shneur Salomon ordered

his Hassidim to study the whole Talmud every year ; in every town everyone should receive a part of the Talmud to study. Thus the whole of the Talmud would be studied by the Hassidim of the town during the year. When the Zaddik Rabbi Shloma of Karline once expressed a desire to settle in a town near Ladi, — where Rabbi Shneur Salomon himself was living, — and asked for permission to do so, Rabbi Shneur Salomon agreed only on one condition — that he was not to despise the study of the Talmud by his Hassidim.

Through Rabbi Shneur Salomon Hassidism was affected in the same way as its predecessor, the Cabbala. The Cabbala which stood in such sharp contrast to Rabbinism, gave Rabbinism its strongest support ; one of the Cabbalists Rabbi Josef Caro was the author of the "Shulchan Aruch." And Hassidism, which was hostile to Rabbinism, gave Rabbinism through one of its leaders a new fortification. Rabbi Shneur Salomon renewed the "Shulchan Aruch."

Rabbi Shneur Salomon, who brought rationalism into Hassidism, was the only man who could compile a new book of laws. And in him we see these two extremes, Rabbinism and Hassidism touch one another.

Thus we see Rabbi Shneur Salomon essentially as a Rationalist, yet sometimes we see him seized by "emotion," particularly in the question of the Divinity. He took no regard at all of the Cosmos as it was. He said: "What is the value of the material world with its numerous creations ? It represents an apparent substance. In reality it is naught, and we cannot call it substance." The essential to Rabbi Shneur Salomon was the way in which "the sparks of Divinity penetrate into the world." Not the created, but the Creator, and the relations of the Creator with the created is the chief problem for him.

In all that concerned the Divinity we find Rabbi Shneur Salomon entirely on the side of "emotion." He made the axioms of all Cabbalists his own, for

which he found a support in a verse of Job. "Mibsari achse Aloah," that is to say: "From my body I perceive God." Rabbi Shneur Salomon said: "I really see God from my body. I perceive him. Indeed, it is not possible to see God with material eyes"—it is with the perception of God as with a man who feels the soul which gives life to his body and he cannot see it: "I feel Him, but I do not see Him." It is not sufficient for a man to realise the greatness of God, and his creation only by means of "reason"—the perception must be founded on "emotion."

We can define the doctrine of Chabad as follows: Whilst the Hassidism of the Ukraine based everything on "emotion," Chabad added "reason" to "emotion," giving "reason" the higher place.

### III.

The chief work of Rabbi Shneur Salomon, "Likute Amarim" or "Tanih," under which title it is best known, is the first book in Hassidic literature, which contains a logically-arranged system. His colleagues limited themselves to homiletics and ethics, while they provided the words of their Master Baal-Shem with explanations and interpretations. "Taniah" is an independent work, in spite of the fact that it is based on the Hassidism of Besht.

Rabbi Shneur Salomon introduced discipline into Hassidism, he regulated study and made it obligatory, whilst his colleagues only thought of strengthening faith in God and in the Zaddik.

To Rabbi Shneur Salomon the Zaddik was not a Miracle-worker, but a teacher and educator. The Zaddik of Chabad and his followers were not on such intimate terms as were the other Zaddikim with their Hassidim. The Zaddik of Chabad came together with his followers only in order to communicate his teachings to them and after that he betook himself again to his study. His followers did not make a

personal cult of the Zaddik, they did not make pilgrimages to his tomb, they did not celebrate his anniversary. They only observed the 19th of Kislev, the day on which the doctrine of the "Rav" had gained the victory.

The doctrine of Habadic Hassidism, although it had been laid down in the principal work of its founder, yet passed through many transformations in the course of its later development : through the son of the founder, Rabbi Baer, who became known as the middle Rabbi, through Rabbi Baer's follower, Rabbi Mendel of Lubavitz and his followers and disciples. There is a big literature in existence dealing with the doctrine of Chabad, but much more than has been published is to be found in manuscript-form, copied and handed down from teacher to disciple.

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The closing days of Rabbi Shneur Salomon were full of sufferings and wanderings from place to place. He was forced to leave the town of Ladi, which was menaced by Napoleon's army.

While on the road, Rabbi Shneur Salomon was taken ill and died. This was in the year 1819 on the 24th day of Teveth in a village near Poltava and he was buried in the town of Hadiatz.

Two days before his death he asked his grand-child Menachem Mendel : "Do you see the ceiling?" The grand-child remained silent. Rabbi Shneur Salomon then said, himself answering his question in a breaking voice : "I cannot see anything more. I can only see the spirit of everything and the power of God to create and make animate everything living."

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VII.

**THE "GRAND-SIRE" OF SHPOLA.**



## THE "GRAND-SIRE" OF SHPOLA.

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**S**UCH was his name and as such he is remembered until this day.

Everyone, men and women, old people and children called him by that name: The Grand-sire of Shpola. The majority of them did not know that his real name was Rabbi Loeb.

Rabbi Loeb preferred to be called "Grand-sire," because he did not like the terms Rabbi, Zaddik, Maggid.

Even the contemporary Zaddikim during his lifetime and afterwards spoke of him as the "Grand-sire," and they sanctified and glorified his name. The "Grand-sire of all Israel," they called him.

Why was he given this name? Because his love for the Jewish people was as great and sincere as the love of a good grand-father for his grand-children.

The Hassidim tell many stories of the life of R. Loeb. Before he was born, they say, Besht, who was not yet known at that time, came with staff and scrip to Loeb's father, Rabbi Baruch, who lived in a village near Uman (in the province of Kiev). He was a simple, honest and generous man. Besht told him that a son would be born to him, and that the soul of Rabbi Loeb the "Great" of Prague would be transmitted to him, and that he was to be named Loeb. Rabbi Baruch did not know anything of Besht. And it happened in the year 1725, that the son who had

been foretold was born. Many poor people came to the "circumcision," and among them was Besht himself, who welcomed the child and called him "Grand-sire."

And the child grew up and developed in body and mind. He was a "prodigy," possessed of a thorough knowledge of the Bible and the Gemara. But the boy's education was broken off because of the death of his mother. His father lost all his money and he decided to send the boy to the Zaddik, Rabbi Pinchos of Koritz, that this holy man might take him under his care and educate him. Rabbi Pinchos immediately recognised the great ability and talent of the youth and received him with great kindness. Loeb spent several years in the home of the Zaddik. When he had completed his 18th year, the Zaddik said to him: "Now you can go and find the path of righteousness for yourself." Rabbi Loeb returned to his native town, married and stayed in the home of his father-in-law. He gave himself up entirely to study, and was occupied day and night with the revealed and the secret teachings. He went often to visit Rabbi Pinchos of Koritz, his teacher, and to take advice from him how to serve God.

Meanwhile Besht had revealed himself, and his glory became known among the Jews of the Ukraine. And one day when Rabbi Loeb came to visit Rabbi Pinchos and to ask him whether he thought it right that he should take up the profession of a shochet, the Zaddik said to him: "There is a great light shining out from Medzibosh, in comparison with which I am as the light of a planet against the light of the sun. We will go to him together and he will advise you what you should do." And they both went to see Besht. When they entered the room, and beheld the face of Besht, Rabbi Loeb was seized with a great fear and fell into a faint. He was about to fall, but Rabbi Pinchos held him up, put him on to a seat and dashed cold water over him. Besht smiled when

he saw this and he said to Rabbi Pinchos : "I thought he was as steady as a rock, and I see that he is still too young and weak to be a support to his people." And to Rabbi Loeb he said : "You must go on working. The path which lies before you is long. Remain with me now ; you will learn to understand why you were born and what you have to do in this sinful world."

About a fortnight after, Rabbi Loeb was called to Besht, who said to him : "You think to feed the bodies of our brethren with kosher meat ; but you did not come into this world for that. Not for the bodies, but for the souls were you sent. There are many outcast souls in this world, and since they are part of the basis of your own soul, it rests with you to strive to save them. These souls are scattered far over Russia ; most of them are in the Ukraine, and if you do not save them, they will never be saved." Rabbi Loeb trembled, and he said : "Who am I and what am I, that I should be able to save the souls of Israel ?" And Besht answered him, saying : "It is true that you have not yet attained to so high a state. For man is like the tree in the forest : rotten and fetid is the root of the tree in the earth, and it is only later that it appears above ground and brings forth fruit to feed and keep alive mankind. Even the most honest and upright man cannot become a Zaddik until his soul has been purified either by the exile or by suffering disgrace and complete humiliation." Then Rabbi Loeb understood which was the way that was shown to him ; he understood that knowledge of the revealed and hidden things did not lead man to God — and he prepared himself for his Exile so that he might weed out and replant, demolish and reconstruct. He left Besht, returned to his home to bid farewell to his wife, and he went out into Exile. He walked from town to town and from village to village, like a beggar, his clothes ragged, torn and thread-bare. He suffered hunger together with the poor men and he shared their

lot. For some years he led this life of banishment and suffered physical and mental anguish. One day while he was journeying together with another beggar man, his companion stole a number of silver articles. Fearing detection, he ran away, leaving the stolen goods with Rabbi Loeb, who knew nothing of the theft. Rabbi Loeb was arrested and he was cast into prison, where he remained until his innocence was established. One day he came to a village and he heard people saying that a Jew had been put into prison because he had not paid his rent to the lord of the village, and his life was in great danger. He was given one chance of escaping his punishment — if he would dance on all fours dressed in a bear-skin before the lord of the village on his birthday. Rabbi Loeb decided that he himself would dance before the lord of the village in place of the old Jew, who was weak and ill. Fortunately the substitution was not noticed, and the old Jew was released.

In the course of his wanderings, Rabbi Loeb came to the town of Slatopoli and took a position there as beadle in the synagogue. Like Besht who had held a similar position, he was able to observe what was being done by the "scholars" and the "learned men" in the synagogue. As with Besht, so with Rabbi Loeb this was only a veil to conceal his real work in the study of the Torah. And no one in the synagogue and no one in the town knew what kind of man Rabbi Loeb really was. To them he was a good beadle, very diligent in his work and everyone was satisfied with him. He often went to visit Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polona, a disciple of Besht. But he never again saw Besht, because his father had forbidden him to see Besht. Rabbi Loeb felt this very much all his life and he suffered because of it.

Meanwhile Rabbi Loeb's fame spread and people began to come to him to ask him for advice and expecting him to do miracles. So Rabbi Loeb left Slatopoli and he took up his abode in the town of

Shpola, where he remained for the rest of his life, till the day of his death. He took his name from the name of the town and he is known to the present day as "The Grand-sire of Shpola."

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Rabbi Loeb's great desire was to lead back into the straight path the sons of Israel who had gone astray. He sought them out and won their confidence and their love. He did not speak to them in the words of his doctrinal teachings which they could not understand. He used every-day common heart-to-heart talk, combining it with plenty of popular sayings and proverbs and stories full of morals and good advice. He frequently made use of the proverbs of the Ukrainian peasants, explaining them in his own way. And he always quoted the Psalms in his intercourse with the people.

Rabbi Loeb loved the simple people, especially the poor, and he distributed among them all the money which was presented to him by his admirers.

His love for the Jews was boundless. To him they were the chosen people, and he sought to justify them on every occasion. He once said to God: "Lord of the world, by punishment Thou wilt never improve the Jews; and as thou knowest this well Thyself, why dost Thou punish them in vain? I beg Thee, be a good Father to the Jews." Another time he supplicated God in these words: "Lord of the world, what dost Thou demand of Israel? Thou hast given them sins, and hast described hell only in books. Hadst Thou done the reverse. i.e. shown them hell in reality and had books written about sins, not one Jew would have committed a sin." In his great love for the Jews, Rabbi Loeb dared to proceed even against God Himself. Once, so they say, a famine broke out in Russia during his life-time, which caused the Jews terrible suffering. And the "Sire" summoned ten of the Zad-

dikim to his house and he said to them: "I have a lawsuit against God, and I appoint you to be the jury. According to the law, the trial must take place where the defendant dwells, but God dwells everywhere and He is here with us now; therefore, the law-suit can take place here." So they all prayed together, and the Sire ordered his servant to call out in a clear voice: "In the name of the Holy Council, which is now assembled here, I inform you that Rabbi Loeb, the son of Rachel, summons the Holy One to a trial of Justice, and the judgment will be given here in this room three days hence."

For three whole days, the Council sat locked into the room, neither eating nor drinking and they prayed unceasingly. And their prayers were mingled with bitter tears. On the fourth day, the "Sire" began to set out his complaints: "In the name of all the women and children of the Russian Jews," he cried, "I demand that God, praised be His Name, be tried. Why does not God give them food? Why has he ordered the famine to destroy them?" The Jews Rabbi Loeb continued, were innocent of sin, and he demanded that God should at least provide for the women and children of Israel. Those assembled in the Council agreed with Rabbi Loeb and formulated the following decision: "Justice is with Rabbi Loeb, the son of Rachel. God, praised be His Name, must nourish the women and children of Israel under all circumstances. And as the Court of Justice has decided here on earth, so must the Court of Justice decide above in heaven."

Rabbi Loeb frequently cried out: "Father, Father, deliver us from Exile and do not let us sleep an everlasting sleep."

Rabbi Loeb loved the little children of Israel dearly. He liked to play with them and to give them gifts and sweets. If he heard a child weep, he left his studying of the Torah and his prayers and ran to console it. Once, so folk-lore relates, on Yom

Kippur, while the people were waiting in the synagogue for the "Kol Nidrei" service to start, they saw that the "Sire" was not there. They waited a long time but he did not come. Everybody became anxious and they went and searched for him in the town. They looked for him everywhere, and finally they found him sitting by the cradle of a weeping child, whose parents had left it alone and gone to the synagogue.

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The "Sire" taught the people the ways of God. He awakened in their hearts love and fear of Him. He taught them that the flame of God must always be burning in the heart of man; this treasure, the heart, must be pure and honest and a Divine light, an eternal light, must ever be burning in it, concealed from all others.

Rabbi Loeb loved those who worshipped God in spite of difficulties. When a farmer who lived in a remote village once complained to him that he was obliged to spend his whole day among uncultured people, who were always drunk and that he was afraid lest he himself become coarsened through contact with them, the Sire laughed at him and said: "I see that you would like to be an honest Jew on condition that you have a sack full of gold coins and that you are placed in a beautiful castle filled with sacred books. But I tell you, that the worship which God demands of man is that which is rendered after overcoming difficulties and fighting against obstacles."

And when they asked him once, which was the right way of serving God, by living a happy life and rejoicing or by fasting and doing penance, he replied: "The demon once complained to God that he had no work to do in the period between Adam and Abraham, because the generation of that epoch sinned so greatly without having to be tempted by him. And God said to him: "Wait until Abraham comes."

When Abraham came, the demon went to him to test him. And Abraham who received every one kindly, received the demon as he received all others—he gave him to eat and to drink, and the demon could not find a way to tempt him to sin. And God laughed at him and said: "You have been bribed by good eating and drinking." And once again the demon complained that he had no work to do. And the Holy One said to him: "Wait until Isaac comes." And when Isaac came, the demon appeared to him as a guest, and began to tempt him to sin. And Isaac, who was a very strong man, took up his stick and thrashed the demon, and the demon ran off as quickly as he could. And God laughed again and said to him: "You are afraid of a hiding." And then he said to the demon: "Wait until Jacob comes." To Jacob the demon appeared in his full strength, determined not to be seduced by good eating and drinking and not to be driven off by a hiding, and he tried to induce Jacob to sin. But Jacob was an upright and guileless man, walking humbly with God, and he acted as if he did not understand the words of the demon. And the demon saw that it was not possible for him to vanquish." And when he had made an end of speaking his parable, the "Sire" concluded: "So know that the chief thing in the worship of God is to do that which the Zaddik orders you to do. Every Zaddik in his own generation has his own way of serving God, because the way which was before him is already known to the demon and he can find a method of putting it to nought. And therefore if you merely follow in the footsteps of the previous generation it is as if you had done nothing at all."

The "Sire" had his own way of serving God—with adoration, with enthusiasm and with great joy he served Him. Dancing too played a great part in his mode of worship. Each Friday evening his Hassidim came together and they sang and Rabbi Loeb danced and clapped his hands. Once, the Hassidim

state, Rabbi Abraham the Angel saw Rabbi Loeb dance and he said: "His dancing is of greater worth than my prayers."



The "Sire" dwelt in Shpola for many years, until he grew to be very old. And people came from all parts of Russia to see him. The Zaddikim of his time often came to him, and whenever any misfortune befell the Jewish people or befell any one of them, they would come to him, to ask him to pray to God for them, for they knew how great was his love for all the people and for each one of them.

So the "Sire" lived in the service of God and the service of the Jews and he hoped that he would be able to spend the rest of his days in this way. But Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav came about this time, and Rabbi Loeb, already an old man, was completely thrown out of his composure.

Young and full of enthusiasm, a profound thinker, a poet, a man of good family, a grand-child of Besht, such was Rabbi Nahman. He settled in Slatopoli, near Shpola, the place of abode of the "Sire". Rabbi Nahman had just returned from his journey to Palestine, fully conscious of himself and he began to live in his own way, or as he himself phrased it, he found a new path such as had not yet been trodden by anyone. He sharply criticised most of the Zaddikim of his time, and spoke of himself as the chosen one among them, as if he were the only man able to be the leader of his generation. It is not surprising therefore that the words of the young Zaddik astonished and excited the old "Sire" of Shpola, who was a simple-minded and easily moved man. He fulminated against Rabbi Nahman and he tried to persuade all the Zaddikim to excommunicate him. It was only by the efforts of Rabbi Levi Itzhok of Berdishev that no ban of excommunication was issued against him.

The attitude of the "Sire" towards Rabbi Nahman caused a serious breach among the Hassidim.

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The "Sire of Shpola" died on Tishri 6th, 1814. Before his death, he told his Hassidim to write only his name and the date of his death on his tombstone.

Over his tomb a mausoleum has been built and people go there to pray to him.



VIII.

**RABBI NAHMAN OF BRATZLAV.**



## RABBI NAHMAN OF BRATZLAV.

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### I.

**I**N the year 1772, a few months before the death of the Maggid of Medseriz, in the month of Nithan, Rabbi Nahman was born in the town of Miedziboz.

His father, Rabbi Simcho, was the son of Rabbi Nahman of Horodenky, who came of a well-known Rabbinical family, and had been a disciple of Besht. His maternal grand-mother was the daughter of Besht.

The child Nahman was brought up under strict Hassidic supervision. "When he was six years of age," Hassidic folk-lore tells us, "he used to envy the grown-up people whom he saw around him, praying with great enthusiasm." He began to mortify his body by fasting. He would go for many days without food, and when he could no longer withstand the pangs of hunger, he would swallow a little food without masticating it, so that he should not feel the delight of tasting the food. Rabbi Nahman says of himself, that in his childhood he made great efforts to be "pious," and his desire was to "receive the Sabbath in great holiness"; he used to go on Friday afternoons to take a "ritual bath," then he would go home, put on his Sabbath clothes and go to the prayer-house and walk up and down in order to acquire the holiness of the Sabbath and to win "the extra soul." He exerted all efforts "to see something of the mystery — could see nothing, but longed ardently for it."

The atmosphere in which Nahman passed his childhood was full of Hassidic ideas: the longing for the

mystery, and great love and sanctification for God. It made a great impression on the boy. He was not a quiet nor a morbid child who tried to ape his elders ; on the contrary, he was a lively and contented child and liked to take part in games and fun.

His diligence in study was extraordinary. He would give his teachers money out of his pocket-money, in addition to what his father paid them, so that they should teach him more. Sitting in the Cheder, poring over his studies, the child tried to imagine what God looked like, so that he might realise the words : "I am always in the presence of God."

Nahman liked to sit alone when he returned home from Cheder. In his father's house he found a small garret, where he could hide and pray to God as he wished. They were strange prayers, which came from the depths of this childish heart, a heart full of yearning and mysticism. He often went to visit the tomb of his grand-father Besht, and sometimes, he went there during the night, "to speak to his grand-father."

In this way the vivid imagination of Hassidism describes the childhood of Nahman ; surrounds it with legends and ascribes to him supernatural qualities.

At the age of fourteen he married the daughter of a rich man who lived in the village of Hasyatin in Russia. After his wedding he went to live in the house of his father-in-law, and there in the village, Rabbi Nahman began to prepare himself for his mission as the Reviver of Hassidism, the leader of the Hassidim.

It was not easy for him to choose a road for himself in Hassidism. He had a hard struggle, and the road, which he finally chose was different from that of his ancestors and his teachers. He could not agree in many things with the opinions of the contemporary Zaddikim. He laughed at their saying that the Zaddik became famous through the "elevated soul," which had been singled out for him by the Deity. Rabbi Nahman said : "A man is never endowed with a good or bad soul ; everything depends on his own good deeds ; every

one can raise himself, but only by his own actions.”

And so Rabbi Nahman became absorbed in the study of the Bible and the Talmud, the Cabbala and Ethics. He was at that time an ardent believer in the Lurian Cabbala and he acted according to its teaching. He mortified his body, suppressed every fleshly pleasure. Here in the village of Hasyatin he obtained such a mastery over himself, relates the legend, that he overcame all human passions.

## II.

Rabbi Nahman began everything from the beginning.

He was not satisfied with Hassidism as it existed at that time. So he put himself to the task of examining all its religious trends, and finally he chose his own road. Rabbi Nahman left his books and the Cabbala, and he turned his eyes to Nature. He went out into the fields, over hills and mountains, he went on and on, lost in thoughts, seeking for God.

And in the end, as his grandfather Besht had done, he found God on the mountains and in the valleys, in the forests and the fields.

Near the village, the Bratzlav Hassidic folk-lore tells us, there was a high mountain and near the summit there was a large crevice. In this opening Rabbi Nahman was fond of sitting, quietly thinking about God. Sometimes he would ride a horse into the forest. He would dismount and walk on and on, and leave the horse to return alone to the village. In summer he used to take a boat and row on the river, and on its silent bosom become absorbed in his thoughts.

And only after he had discovered the secrets of Nature did he find his solution to the problems of God and Nature.

A new world suddenly opened before him. In every place and in every direction, wherever he turned, he saw God: “God is present,” he said, “in everything,

in every action and in every thought". "The glory of God is proclaimed in everything, for the whole world is full of His glory."

Looking at a human being, Rabbi Nahman used to say: "God is with Thee and around Thee, for the whole world is full of His glory. He surrounds everything and there is no place without Him." He saw the "Shechina" enclosed in creation—"concealed and yet visible." "That which we see," he said, "is only the external, the visible, and that which is concealed from our view, is the internal, the root of it." And Rabbi Nahman recognised God, "who is hidden in every secret and even in the secret of secrets." Even if a man, God forbid, has committed a grievous sin, there too is surely the hand of God—although much concealed.

This was the same recognition of God which was peculiar to his grand-father Besht. All creation was to Rabbi Nahman one living body.—"Everything lives, grows, rises and praises God in song." And if he found constant and fundamental laws in Nature, he saw in them the will of God, for the laws themselves are God.

In those days, while Rabbi Nahman walked alone among the trees of the forest and the grasses of the fields, lost in thought of God and creation,—in those days when he began his ascent towards God, he realised for the first time the marvellous sanctity of Nature and of God who was therein.

And he began to see things which other people could not see, he could hear and understand the whisperings between the grasses and plants, between the flowers and trees.

He perceived that all creation was yearning for God and singing in praise of His Name. "In the winter," Rabbi Nahman used to say,—"all grasses and plants are dead; at the approach of summer, they come to life again, and each blade of grass sings a song to God. How delightful it is to listen

to their songs." By the observance of Nature and of all created things, Rabbi Nahman learned to serve God. He afterwards made use of what he had learned in his sermons and in all his teachings and in his tales.

Rabbi Nahman's life in his village, his loneliness, his keen power of observation in the study of Nature, his merging with the idea of God and His mystery, caused him to think of his grand-father Besht, and to guard the heritage which had been handed down by him.

And he began to examine the foundation of Hassidism. He wished to determine what influence it had on the people and their future. He studied the lives of the Zaddikim and the leaders of his generation. And he decided that it was time to make an end of his retirement and to break his silence. He felt that he must let his voice be heard, that he must go out among the people, to the Hassidim, to the Zaddikim and tell them the truth as it appeared to him.

Hassidism needed a man at that time, who would speak to it without concealing anything. And such a man it found in Rabbi Nahman, who used to say : "It is better for a man to die, than to tell lies."

### III.

Rabbi Nahman left his village and went among his people, among his brethren the Hassidim. He chose the town of Medvedivky to be his place of abode. He received 300 roubles from his father-in-law, and with this he maintained his family. When this money was spent, he had to submit against his will to take a sum of three roubles a week, which was collected for him by the people of the town. In return for this, he taught the people the doctrine of Hassidism. The Zaddikim were greatly astonished at the young man and they esteemed him highly. This increased his self-conceit and caused him to

speak boastfully of himself,—he used to say, for instance, that Besht often came to speak to him. To one Rabbi he said: “I want to bless you, so that you should be able to understand my ordinary everyday speeches in the next world.”

Only fifty years had elapsed since the death of Besht, and about forty since the death of the Maggid of Meshiritz, and the Hassidism of the Ukraine had already begun to decline. It is true that Hassidism had by that time been very widely propagated and the number of Hassidim was growing constantly more numerous,—but Rabbi Nahman had keen vision and he saw that it had lost much of its original vigour, and that what was being done now was only external and superficial.

He studied the life of the Hassidim, he looked deep down into their souls and he found that their devotion to Hassidism had lessened, their ardour had cooled. And searching for the reason of this, he discovered that the fault lay with the leaders, with the Zaddikim. Besht and many other Zaddikim had improved things during their lives, but with their death, their work had died with them. This had been so only because the right man had not been there to lead Hassidism and to spread the influence of Besht and his disciples.

Not one of the Zaddikim of his day was worthy of being a leader of Hassidism. “Their greatest ideal was to wrap themselves in their prayer shawls, to put on their phylacteries, and to pray all day long; but in reality they were only hypocrites.” How was he to restore Hassidism to its former splendour and to assure its continued existence? It was necessary he said, to appoint suitable disciples, who would be able to hand down the idea of Hassidism from one generation to the other. And all the Hassidim without exception had to co-operate, for it was not given to every generation to have a great leader, upon whom the holy spirit rested, and therefore the Hassidim

had to take the responsibility upon themselves, so that they should preserve the inner purity of Hassidism. But how was he to spur the Hassidim to action, so that they should hand down Hassidism from generation to generation? Had not Hassidism lost much of its outward form? Everything had become faded, impoverished.

Rabbi Nahman did not seek merely to repeat the teaching of Besht and his disciples. He was far too original to derive from others. Besides he did not agree with all the views of Besht, and so he was obliged to begin afresh.

Rabbi Nahman realised what a great and difficult task he had taken upon himself. He felt sure of his spiritual power, but he wondered whether he was not too young. He was at that time only twenty six years of age, and the task was so difficult — to destroy and to reconstruct. On the one side, combat with the traditional Zaddikim, who in his opinion, were bad leaders, destroying everything that still remained of Hassidism, and on the other side, the difficulties of building up a new Temple for a strong Hassidism. He used to say: "I shall make a path through impassable desert land. I shall hew down the trees, one by one, which have stood for thousands of years, so that the path shall be passable."

To attain his object, Rabbi Nahman wanted to recruit new, strong and intellectual forces for Hassidism, and these he expected to find only in Palestine. He felt that if he went to Palestine he would come back a new man, invigorated and with increased spiritual power.

#### IV.

In the year 1798, on the eve of Passover, Rabbi Nahman made it known to his followers that he intended to go to Palestine that year, and soon after the holidays he began to prepare for the journey. He knew what difficulties and obstacles lay in store

for him, but he was ready to brave the worst. "While I am breathing and alive, I must go to Palestine," he said to his wife.

That same year, in the month of Iyar, Rabbi Nachman left the town of Medvedivky and proceeded to Palestine, by way of Odessa and Constantinople. He took one attendant with him on his journey, and he travelled incognito.

After countless difficulties and hindrances, he reached Haifa in 1799, on the eve of Rosh-Hashona, the Jewish New Year. The adventures of Rabbi Nachman are described in Hassidic legend as supernatural. The followers of Besht met him on his arrival, and begged him to come to Safed or Tiberias, where most of the Hassidim were living. But Rabbi Nachman declined their invitation, telling them that he wanted to pass the holy days in solitude. After the Feast of Tabernacles, he settled upon the town of Tiberias as his place of residence. Rabbi Nahman stayed all the winter in Palestine. He steeped himself there in the books of the Cabbala, and he frequently visited the tombs of Rabbi Simon ben Jochai and Rabbi Yitzhok Luria, where he remained long absorbed in thought. Near these holy graves he was able to see the Cabbala in its true light.

Rabbi Nahman's sojourn in Palestine resulted in a strengthening of Hassidism there. He spread the doctrines of Hassidism also among the strict Cabbalists who had hitherto held aloof from Hassidism, and he gained many new followers.

Rabbi Nahman's great desire was to stay in Palestine. He felt that Palestine was the most suitable place for him; he believed that only in Palestine would he be able to find his sublime spirit, which was hovering in the air of the Holy Land. But his heart was bound to the Hassidim who had remained in Exile and were waiting with longing for his return. He felt that he was the only man who was able to

revive Hassidism. He had great faith in his own powers.

So he returned to his place of Exile.

He returned, but in reality he did not leave the Holy Land until his last day. He brought back with him into Exile the atmosphere, the secret of the holiness of Palestine. "The only place for me," Rabbi Nahman said after his return, "is Palestine." In every place to which he came he saw Palestine. "Wherever I go," he said, "I go to Palestine." The air he breathed, the life around him, all the feelings and all the thoughts which came to him were inspired by his having been in Palestine — "for the chief of everything is in Palestine." He sought to forget the life which he had led before he had gone to Palestine and he told his followers not to quote words which he had uttered before his visit to the Holy Land. In Palestine alone was the atmosphere charged with the Divine spirit. In Palestine alone was the source of reason and wisdom. It was the real "spiritual centre," and the Jews who lived in foreign countries received their spiritual sustenance from there. Every Jew had a share in Palestine, and the use to which he put it, depended on his individual power of receptiveness. "He who wishes to be a real Jew," he said "must go to Palestine in spite of all difficulties and obstacles." When his disciples, who were accustomed to take the words of their Master symbolically, asked him if he was thinking of the spiritual Palestine, he answered irritably: "No, I mean the real Palestine, with its houses and its streets, as we see it with the human eye."

In the summer of 1799, Rabbi Nahman came back to his Hassidim, visiting various Zaddikim on his way, and everywhere he was received with great honour.

And Rabbi Nahman began to speak boastfully of himself. "The well known Zaddikim," he said, and he regarded himself as the chief of them, "make themselves worthy of sublime wisdom by means of their

journey to Palestine." He became extremely vain, and said that he could see in the ocean, that which it was not granted either to the Tannaim or to the Amoraim to see. Because he had acquired in Palestine a more exact knowledge of the study of the Talmud and of the fulfilment of the commandments, Rabbi Nahman regarded himself as a conqueror of the spiritual world. He saw himself holding a prominent position among the contemporary Zaddikim. Not one of these Zaddikim was great, he used to say, and he declared war on those who in his opinion were bad leaders of Hassidism. He was very severe in his pronouncements against them. "There are leaders," he used to say, "who bear the name of 'Rabbi,' but who have no power of control, either over themselves, or over the community, and these people allow themselves to become leaders of the multitude." He called them liars and hypocrites, and he wrote sarcastically of them. "It was difficult" he said, "for Satan to lead the world astray, therefore he appointed such men in various places to help him."

He made all the Zaddikim of his time feel the keen edge of his sarcasm. And the Zaddikim began to war against him.

The more Rabbi Nahman blamed those around him, the greater became his self-esteem as a man who had attained to the highest conception of the "recognition of the greatness of God" "Even there, in the higher sphere, in the region of pure truth, they would rejoice at the sagacity of his interpretations." "If his theory had been proclaimed during the life-time of Rabbi Simon ben Jochai or Rabbi Isaac Luria, it would have produced a real epoch, for his theory came from the same source as that from which the Torah of Moses came. His inspiration came direct from God. He possessed power such as no other mortal possessed. If a man were to find but a part of his wisdom, the joy would compensate him even if he lacked food and drink."

Rabbi Nahman divided the Exilic history of Israel into four periods: the periods of Rabbi Simon ben Jochai, Rabbi Isaac Luria, Besht and himself. The first three had influenced the spiritual life of Israel during their own life-time, and now, it was he, Rabbi Nahman who was the most fitting leader of his own period. The real object of his life was "to lead the souls of the Jews to God." But for his aid, how many people would have been destroyed spiritually? And the Zaddikim, too, needed him as a guide, to lead them into "the right path." Rabbi Nahman did not see his own vanity. On the contrary, he regarded himself as the most modest of men, a man like Moses, who said of himself: "and he, Moses, was a modest man."

All this, his expressed contempt for the contemporary "Zaddikim" on the one side, and his exaggerated praise of himself on the other side, led to a great deal of feeling and started a controversy and a movement against Rabbi Nahman.

Rabbi Nahman remained unmoved. He did not reply to the attacks made upon him. "How can they help quarrelling with me?" he said. "Have I not chosen a path not trodden before?" "Our patriarch Abraham," said Rabbi Nahman, "suffered much because of the persecution of the older men, in whom stupidity had taken root, so that they could not understand the young men who believed in Abraham and obeyed him." Rabbi Nahman did not want to be angry with anyone—his only answer to his opponents was to shake his head to show them that they were not capable of understanding him, that he was not of this world. "We," he once said to his Hassidim, "are like a musician who plays and the people around him are dancing,—those who do not understand the beauty of the music cannot contain themselves for astonishment. Why are the people running after the musician, why are they dancing? And in the same way they cannot understand why you are running after me."

Rabbi Nahman's silence did not pacify his enemies. The opposition to him grew more intense. His Hassidim were persecuted. The Hassidim of the other Zaddikim refused to intermarry with them, and would not eat the meat killed in their slaughter-houses, because they regarded it as not "ritual."

## V.

In the year 1802 Rabbi Nahman came to live in the town of Bratzlav. and he made great efforts there to spread his doctrines. He taught his Hassidism in many ways. He wrote letters, delivered speeches, wrote and told parables and tales. And he felt the need for a learned man who should be able to write well and put down his (Rabbi Nahman's) thoughts in writing. "Many times," Rabbi Nahman said, "I have to repeat my sayings. I must therefore have someone to whom I can speak my thoughts." And he succeeded in finding Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov, who became his disciple.

Rabbi Nahman began to instruct his new disciple in writing down his doctrine and his tales, and Rabbi Nathan soon became accustomed to the work, and he wrote as his master wished. Rabbi Nathan wrote well. His books and the prayers which he composed are evidence of this. He did more. He was the first of the Jewish writers to give exact dates: he stated the day, sometimes even the hour when his master had delivered his sermon, or told his story. We have no one like him in our literature; he was a Jewish Eckerman.

And Rabbi Nathan wrote down and translated the words of his Rabbi from Yiddish into Hebrew. Thousands of copies were made of his writings and they were distributed among the Hassidim of Bratzlav.

And so Bratzlav became the centre of the new Hassidism—as Medshiboz and Meseritz had been before. Eyes were everywhere turned towards the

“Holy Town,” where the new Hassidism had appeared, a doctrine essentially different from the other Hassidic teachings. Hundreds of Hassidim left their former comrades, and went to Bratzlav, which became to them the “holy of holies.”

And the “Master,” Rabbi Nahman, received them all with great love. He knew how to hold their hearts. He treated them as a father his dearly beloved children. He held himself the equal of his Hassidim, not their master, as did most of the Zaddikim. “Each one of you,” he once said to his Hassidim, “has a place in my heart.” On another occasion Rabbi Nahman wrote to his Hassidim while away on a journey: “We are indeed separated from each other, but our souls are united all the time.” “Every one of you is a partner in my doctrine,” he said. “The doctrine of the real Zaddik,” he explained to his Hassidim, “is brought into being as a result of the large number of people who come to him and surround him.” And once when Rabbi Nahman was ill, he asked his Hassidim to pray to God, that he should cure him,—he felt himself one with them, and made no distinctions between them and himself. He could do many things for his Hassidim; only he required their assistance. “Why should you worry,” said Rabbi Nahman to his Hassidim, “give me the bricks and mortar, and I shall build you the most beautiful castles.” He wished also to do penance for the sins of his Hassidim. “I will do penance for you,” he said, “and I can make good again all that you have spoilt.”

Rabbi Nahman made a point of drawing closely to himself the youngest of his Hassidim. “I cannot bear to see the old men always around me,”—he once said,—“it is not good to be old: nor is it good to be an old Hassid or an old Zaddik. We must renew ourselves each day.”

Rabbi Nahman was an active man, who loved Nature which is never in repose, always in motion, and he hated resting and laziness: “Work always,”

was his motto. "We must always refresh the mind," he said, "for when we refresh the mind, we refresh the soul also, because the mind is the soul."

He was extremely kind to the poorer Hassidim. "When I see a poor man with his clothes in rags and his shoes torn, serving God," he said, "I love this man very much." He loved the Hassidic workman.

Rabbi Nachman taught his Hassidim that at every step they took in their journey to him, an angel was born, and that they themselves became more pure and holy, so that all who approached them would become holy. He urged them to come to him, especially at Rosh-Hashanah. "Eat or do not eat, sleep or do not sleep, pray or do not pray, but you must come to me at Rosh-Hashanah." These days of meditation are the most important days, and Rabbi Nahman waited the whole year round for these days to come. "To me," he used to say, "Rosh-Hashanah is the most important time. As soon as it is over, I wait and prepare for the next Rosh-Hashanah."

Rabbi Nahman wished that even after his death he should continue to be among his Hassidim, as he was with them during his life. He hinted to them that it would not be necessary for them to look for another leader when he died, because he would still be among them. "To the Zaddik there is no distinction between death and life," he once said. "Previously he lived here and then he chose the other world to be his place of abode; it is as if he had gone from one room into the other, and he will certainly hear if any one calls him."

Rabbi Nahman repressed his desire to go a second time to Palestine, because he did not want to leave his Hassidim. "I wish to be always with you, and you will come to visit me when I am in my grave," he said. And he instructed them to go to his grave and to talk to him, as if he were alive. He promised to save them from hell, if they did this, even though they had committed the most grievous sin.

Among the multitude of Rabbi Nahman's Hassidim, some were disciples very dear to his heart. They spent the greater part of the year at his side, although he himself complained that they did too much. But they could not live without him, and without hearing his words.

And sometimes he walked together with them outside the town and he talked to them and told them parables and tales. He liked to hear them speak of topical events, of political affairs.

And listening to their conversation he elaborated a doctrine and showed them the right way to live. "Tell your children and your grand-children all you see and hear," he said to them.

Rabbi Nahman would speak his "Torah" to his Hassidim whenever they asked him to speak. Even when his life was in grave danger he did not refuse them. A few days before his death, at the last Rosh-Hashana of his life, Rabbi Nathan tells us, while Rabbi Nahman was preparing to recite the "Torah," he became ill. He had a terrible cough and the blood poured from his mouth. Everyone saw that he was dying. "Hours passed, night came, and we stood in the other room waiting for him to come and speak to us Torah. Our eyes ached with looking for him, —the room was crowded, we could hardly breathe. But he did not come, because his illness had grown worse. And then he sent for me. When I entered the room, I saw wax-candles burning there, and several men round him. He asked me what to do, if it was impossible for him to recite the 'Torah' to the people. I begged him to try. And he answered me: 'Then I shall make the effort.' And he went into the other room, and sat in the high chair which had been prepared for him, and he remained silent for a moment. Then he began in a feeble voice to recite the wonderful words of the Torah."

Rabbi Nahman was the real "Zaddik," the perfect type produced by Hassidism, the type of "Zaddik" whom Rabbi Nahman himself described as "the soul of the people," because the Zaddik and the people, as he said, are united as the soul and the body. The Zaddik is the Leader and the Master of the people, and the people must believe in him. Their faith must be pure and strong and without doubt. The Hassid must confess his sins to his Zaddik, because he, the Zaddik, "forgives sins." A Hassid of Bratzlav wrote to me once that Rabbi Nahman did not recognise his Hassidim until they had confessed to him.

In this one question of confession, Rabbi Nahman was and has continued to be unique in Judaism.

## VI.

"Pure faith without any sophistries"—this was Rabbi Nahman's foundation stone and his chief maxim in Judaism. Taking his stand on this point, he opposed the whole literature of the Jewish scholars, especially the work of Maimonides. Of Maimonides' book "More Nebochim" he wrote the following: He who studies this book loses sight of the Divine countenance."

The greatest and the most important part of Divine service, as Rabbi Nahman saw it, is prayer. "It is as if it were a part of the 'Shechina'," he said, "and the more a man prays, the stronger it becomes." And the prayer must be said with joy and inspiration. "Man must lose himself in prayer and entirely forget his own existence." "It is as if one stood before a king and surrendered all thought of oneself in order to concentrate entirely on the king." "He who prays must speak every word with devotion. It is to be compared to a man who wanders through the field gathering flowers, one by one, to make of them a beautiful bouquet. In the same way a man must

gather each letter, each syllable to form them into words, the words of prayer."

Praying in the open air is better, more efficacious. It is best to pray when one is far away from one's fellow man, because most men are false, erring and seductive. In the field, the prayers of man are united with the prayers of all creation and the prayers of heaven and earth, so that they supplement each other and form a wondrous harmony. Each grass joins in the prayer, supplements it and gives it greater force. "Everything is moved to praise God." And he who is praying, calls to each and all to come and praise God. "Praised be the God of Heaven, praised be all His angels, praised be all His creation!"

Rabbi Nahman would rather have prayers which come from the depths of the heart, than the customary prayers which are repeated mechanically, and which do not come from the heart. "It would be much better," he said, "for every man to pray when he feels inspired, to pray his own prayer and in a language which is familiar to him. For in that way he will understand the words he is saying and will devote himself through them to God."

But even so strong-willed a man as Rabbi Nahman could not break down the custom of repeating the usual prayers, and so he added, that "Since the members of the great Synod have already established the prayers for us, we are obliged to say our prayers in Hebrew as they have determined." But Rabbi Nahman did not really change his opinion, and if he could not alter the deeply rooted custom of praying prayers composed by others, he at least urged the people to add other prayers to God, in their everyday tongue, in addition to the official prayers.

Solitude is given great importance in Hassidism, more especially in the Hassidism of Bratzlav. "Solitude," Rabbi Nahman used to say, "is the highest state. Only in solitude can man attain to the abnegation of the 'Ego,' (Bitul hoyesh) and thus attain

union with the eternal God. Therefore a man must seek to be alone, at least for an hour each day. Especially at night, when everyone is asleep and all things are quiet. Solitude in the open air, in the forest or in the desert is of the utmost importance."

"All your actions and all your intentions, the whole of your spiritual and physical life must be saturated in joy." This cult of joy did not originate with Hassidism. We find traces of it in the Talmud. But the suffering endured in the long exile changed the outlook of the Jews, and instead of days of rejoicing, we have fast days, tearful prayers, and lamentations. It is true, that here and there among the writings of the Jewish philosophers, we find them lifting up their voices against the cult of sadness, but they had no effect upon the Jewish people, because what they said did not come from the true heart of the Jews; their works were written under the influence of Hellenic philosophic literature, and they were foreign to the Jews. The "Zohar" forbade rejoicing in Exile. "While the Jews are in Exile," it said, "they are not allowed to enjoy themselves, or to take part in any amusements." Then came the Lurian Cabbala, which lays down rules for mourning, mortification, lamentation and the abolition of all pleasure. This continued until Hassidism came and changed the whole position. Rabbi Nahman reintroduced joy into Jewish life. "Joy," he said, "prevails in spheres of liberty." "Common sense is strengthened by joy." "God is with the joyful man; the sad man is forsaken by God." "Man must endeavour to turn all the sorrows and troubles which befall him into joy." "Man must try to drown his sorrows and troubles in beautiful song; melody and song lead the heart of man to God."

Melody occupies a very important place in Hassidism, especially so with Rabbi Nahman. He found in melody the essence of all thought. "Every wisdom in the world has its own melody. All creation resolves itself into melody." Rabbi Nahman discovered melody

in everything. "Faith in God," he said, "has its own melody, the most important in the world, affecting all other melodies." Rabbi Nahman discovered melody in the whole universe, in every man's soul. "Nature is saturated with melody; heaven and earth are full of song. The man who hears this melody becomes purified and inspired to lead a new life, especially if he can understand also the dance, which produces a complete harmony through its rhythm. Every limb of the body contains in itself a rhythm which corresponds to the rhythm of the melody. There is a rhythm in the movement of the head, in the movement of the whole body, of the feet and so forth, all according to the rhythm in the melody. The melody appears more complete if it is fitted with words, because the rhythm of verses in combination with the melody produces a harmony. How splendid it is to hear this and to see it supplemented by dancing." Among all the Zaddikim there was no one like Rabbi Nahman, so enthusiastic about melody, song and dancing. Rabbi Nathan tells us that his master often used to dance, while some of his disciples sang.

## VII.

Ethics was the most important element in the Hassidism of Rabbi Nahman. He severely condemned lying. "The lie," he said, "is evil, impure." "Lies make the Divinity die in a man." "It is better for a man to die, than to save his life by means of a lie."

Rabbi Nahman forbade every kind of flattery and envy. "One must not despise or annoy anyone," he said, "and if someone has offended you, you must be thankful to him." "One should not give way to immoderate drinking, nor engage in improper conversation." Rabbi Nahman emphasised the duties of charity, hospitality, love, peace and harmony in life. He urged his followers to look for the good kernel

contained in every bad thing. "Even a criminal," he said, "has his good side." "One should judge with favour even one's greatest enemy, maybe he is right in some way." "One should not punish one's enemy; rather should one go out to meet him in a friendly manner." "If anyone abuses you be silent. Not in order to provoke your slanderer, but because of your love." "One should always be humble. Humility should not be expressed by the bowing of the head; this is but external humility, which is unworthy; it must be internal humility, a humility which has its origin in wisdom." Here Rabbi Nahman followed in the foot-steps of Besht, who told a parable to illustrate this point: "A certain king wished to make his humility known publicly, so he ordered his carriage to go before him, while he went on foot behind. A wise man, whom he met by the way, objected that this was not humility: 'Get into your carriage,' he said, 'and lead a modest life: this is real modesty, which comes from the heart!'"

Rabbi Nahman laid special emphasis on the importance of honesty in trade, for "in such way," he said, "one can prove that one is keeping the commandments. One should not lend out money at interest. One should be satisfied with little and manage one's household according to one's means. It is better to suffer want, even in food, clothing and shelter, than to be a debtor to others." "One must not give up one's work; for without working one may be reduced to eating the bread of strangers, and being dependent on alms, which makes life bitter, and cuts off the length of years." "Honest dealing is possible only if one is not striving for wealth."

In the whole of Hassidic literature, one will not find such vehement denunciation of wealth, as in the sayings of Rabbi Nahman. "Money," he said, "leads to idolatry." "A really pious man does not take part in the hunt for riches." He fought strenuously against the general view that rich people are to be more

esteemed and more respected, while the poor are to be despised and looked down upon. Of the rich, Rabbi Nahman said: "They are always in debt, slaves to their desires, and slaves to others. Would it not be better if they turned away from their idols of silver and gold and served God?"

A man must not expect to be rewarded for his every good deed, Rabbi Nahman said. The consciousness of having performed a good deed is itself the reward.

Rabbi Nahman did not accept any of the usual laws in Judaism. To him everything was Divine, even the Jewish Ethics.

### VIII.

Rabbi Nahman told fairy tales, not for the sake of their artistic beauty, but for the sake of heaven, for the sake of Hassidism, his Hassidism.

"The Zaddik," said Rabbi Nahman, "is sometimes obliged to weave stories of worldly life around his doctrine, because he cannot always proclaim it openly, even as we cannot always give a sick man his medicine without first coating it. The Torah itself is wrapped round with stories and tales, without which it would have been impossible for it to be handed down."

Rabbi Nahman was unique as a narrator of fairy tales, not only in Hassidism, but in the whole of the older Jewish literature.

He wrote thirteen tales, the products of his poetic imagination, tales about mankind, animals, birds, mountains, valleys, oceans and deserts. He wrote also about evil spirits and ghosts.

He took the subject-matter for his tales from anywhere and he understood how to give it form and to spiritualise it. His tales are full of a rich and wild imagination.

Rabbi Nahman's tales are a treasure of the older Jewish literature, and especially so of Hassidic literature.

They were read and enjoyed by thousands of people, and they quickly became popular and really national works.

Rabbi Nahman first told his stories to his Hassidim in Yiddish, and he gave instructions that they should be published after his death in Yiddish, and that they should also be translated and published in Hebrew.

Most of the Hassidim of Bratzlav did not understand Rabbi Nahman's stories. They believed that they were all full of the holy spirit. They did not distinguish between Rabbi Nahman's book "Likute Mahran" and his fairy-tales. Both were to them pure and holy as the Law of Moses.

Among Rabbi Nahman's thirteen tales, there is one which stands alone because of its wealth of poetry and beautiful imagery. It is in my opinion of greater value than all the others. I mean the tale of the "Seven Beggars." I quote here a few passages from the tale to illustrate its singular beauty.

"At the time of a great flight, when the people were obliged to leave their homes and flee, two little children were in the excitement lost in a large forest; a boy and a girl, one aged three and the other four. One day a blind beggar came and placed bread before them and disappeared. On the second day a deaf beggar brought them food and also disappeared. And so the children were fed every day for a whole week by various crippled beggars. There were a stutterer, a stiff-necked beggar, a hunchback, a beggar without hands, and finally on the seventh day, a beggar without feet. On the seventh day the children wandered into a near-by town, and joined a company of beggars and begged bread from kind people. As the children grew older, they married, and all the beggars of the neighbourhood came to celebrate the wedding. Oh the first day after the marriage, the young couple remembered the blind beggar, who had been the first to offer them food in their need. And immediately the blind beggar appeared and congratulated them

and said: "In reality I am not blind, as you believed. In one moment, I can see all that is going in the world. I am already very old and at the same time I am an infant, for I have not yet begun to live rightly, and notwithstanding, I am very old."

On the second day, the deaf beggar came to congratulate them, and he said: "I am not really deaf, as you think. I do not take any interest in the world, where one hears only of want. All the voices that one hears are voices of lamentation. Everyone complains of his own needs and if anyone rejoices, the real reason for his joy is his want, for he rejoices because he has succeeded in obtaining what he lacked, and therefore he is pleased."

On the third day the stuttering beggar appeared and after he had congratulated them he said: "I am not a stutterer at all; I stutter only where daily words are concerned, which are not uttered in praise of God and which are full of imperfections. I am really an excellent speaker. I can speak riddles and aphorisms. I recite beautiful poems, which are the essence of wisdom. There is a mountain on which there is a stone which has in it the source of a spring. Everything has a heart; the whole universe has a heart. And this heart of the universe is a complete form. It has a face, hands and feet. But the toe-nails on the feet of the heart of the world are much more virile than the heart of any man. The mountain, with its stone and its source are at one end of the world, and the heart of the world is at the other end. The heart is opposite the source and both feel an insatiable longing to reach each other. The heart wishes to come close to the source, and the source wishes to approach the heart. And the heart is plagued by two weaknesses. On the one side it is tormented and scorched by the sun, and on the other side it is consumed by longing. And when it is exhausted by continual languishing, and wishes to rest a little and to gather new strength, a bird appears and with its wings protects the heart

from the scorching heat. But even then it looks constantly towards the source. And should the heart succeed in coming closer to the mountain, it would perish immediately because it would lose sight of the mountain and of the source on its summit. The contemplation of the source constitutes its existence. And together with the heart the whole world would perish, because the heart gives life to every human being."

On the fourth day came the fourth beggar. He congratulated them and told them that really he had not a stiff neck. "I have a nice straight neck," he said. "I am like this in order not to load upon my neck all the vanities and futilities of which there are so many in the world. I have a very good voice too. I can produce various voices which exist in the world and which are wordless."

On the fifth day the hunchbacked beggar came to congratulate them, and assured them that he had straight shoulders. "I have shoulders," he said, "of which one can say that the little contains the much."

On the sixth day came the beggar without hands and congratulated them and told them of the wonderful strength which he possessed in his hands: "I have no bodily defects at all," he said. "I do not use the strength of my hands for worldly purposes because I need them for other things. The water fortress can testify to this. A certain king once wished to take a king's daughter to be his wife. He tried many ways and at last he succeeded. But one night he dreamed that his wife would kill him, and from that time his love towards her vanished. And she too ceased to love him, until finally she fled, and took refuge in the water-fortress. This water-fortress was surrounded by ten walls of water. The ground was water, the trees, the fruits, everything was water. The queen, pursued by the king and his following, decided that she would rather die in the water-fortress, than fall into the power of the king. The king shot ten arrows after

the queen, and she fell wounded into the water, and remained there in a swoon. The king and his men rushed into the water after her, but they were all drowned there." "But I," said the beggar, "forced my way through all the walls of the water-fortress and healed the queen by drawing out all the arrows from her body with my hands."

Rabbi Nahman does not tell us about the seventh day or the seventh beggar. He himself remarks concerning this tale: "It is marvellous and has many morals and is most instructive."

## IX.

So Rabbi Nahman lived quietly in the town of Bratzlav, where he was much respected by all the inhabitants. The number of his Hassidim constantly increased in spite of persecution.

But even in Bratzlav his peace was not to last long. The attacks upon him gradually came to Bratzlav itself, and many of his former friends and followers became estranged from him. And Rabbi Nahman began to weary of his life, and he became a pessimist. He despised life. "What is there in death?" asked Rabbi Nahman. "Must not a man die in any case?" Then he regretted that he was so famous and he longed for a simple, solitary life. He desired to see everything, but not to be seen. And he would walk abroad at times in the streets and in the market places, observing the people, and he would laugh at the whole world. He thought longingly of the time when he had lived in solitude in the country, and could hide himself in the forest or in the field, and when he returned home everything appeared new to him as if it were an entirely new world.

In the year 1807, Rabbi Nahman fell ill of consumption, the disease which finally brought his death. There is no doubt that his delicate body had been greatly enfeebled by the controversies which had raged

around him, and the persecution which had been directed against him and his followers.

When Rabbi Nahman realised the perilous state of his health, he began to speak constantly of his impending death, and he looked about for a burial place near his Hassidim.

After the New-Year of 1808, Rabbi Nahman went to Lemberg and remained there until the end of the summer.

In Lemberg he must have heard of the "Jewish enlightenment" movement which came to Galicia through Krochmal, Erter, Rappoport and others. He read the New Hebrew literature which grew up there about that time, and he complained of it saying; "Because of our sinful time, the poetry of our holy language has sunk so low, that the frivolous people who indulge in sinful desires, take possession of it, and by their eloquence they corrupt the young children of Israel and lead them astray."

In the summer of the year 1808, Rabbi Nahman came back to Bratzlav from Lemberg. But he was no longer the same man. He was nearly always in a bad humour. The insults to which he was subjected, and his sickness depressed him. He could stay no longer in Bratzlav, and he set out to wander from town to town.

In the year 1810, there was a great fire in Bratzlav, and the town was almost entirely destroyed. Rabbi Nahman's house was burned down with the others, and Rabbi Nahman took up his residence in the town of Uman, in the province of Kiev.

Rabbi Nahman had long been wanting to settle in Uman. It was his wish to die there, and as he felt that his time was near, he chose it to be his last abode. He believed that the martyrs who had been massacred there in 1648 by the Heidamaks, wanted him to be near them.

He did not live to reside long in Uman. His disease took strong hold of him, and he grew rapidly weaker.

About two months before his death he was visited by a large number of people. When they came to him, he said: "Why do you come here? I no longer know anything. I am a simple man now." And he spoke to them of his ignorance, and he told them about the journey of a Zaddik to Palestine, and about his journey to the Holy Land. And he became very good humoured again and asked his visitors to sing.

The end came in 1811. He had severe hemorrhage, but he fought against his weakness, and he said wise words to his Hassidim. "It is necessary to have pity on the world," he said to them.

He felt that death was near. "A huge mountain has come to meet us," he said, "but I do not know if we are going towards the mountain, or whether the mountain is approaching towards us."

Shortly before he died, Rabbi Nahman expressed the hope that he had attained a rank so high that it could be reached by no other human being in his state, and he added, that he was looking forward to freeing himself from his body, because it was impossible for him to stay in one rank. He had never done so all his life. Even when he had attained to a very high and important rank, he had always tried to renew himself, and to rise ever higher.

His Hassidim would not leave him for a moment, day or night. They took it in turns to watch by his sick bed.

He died during the night of Tuesday the 18th. of Tishra. Before he died, he ordered his Hassidim to burn all his manuscripts, immediately after his death, while he was still lying on the floor.

The death agony began on Tuesday morning.

His disciples stood around him, their eyes filled with tears.

"Why are you so sad?" Rabbi Nahman asked them. "I am only going ahead of you in order to show you the way."

Rabbi Nathan could not control himself, and cried out :} "Rabbi, Rabbi, to whose care are you leaving us ?"

Rabbi Nahman turned towards him, as if he wanted to say : "I am not leaving you, God forbid !"

Rabbi Nathan writes that Rabbi Nahman after his death "appeared as though he were alive. His face was as sublime as it was when he walked to and fro in his room, lost in thought. That is how he looked as he lay dead on the floor, and a fragrant odour from his body filled the room."

"I wish to remain among you and you must visit my tomb." These words which Rabbi Nahman had often repeated to his disciples, were holy to them ; they found strength and consolation in them. He was not really dead to them. His spirit continued to live among them. The Hassidim of Bratzlav met together at the grave of Rabbi Nahman and spoke to him as if he were alive and sitting among them.

And indeed what was the difference to Rabbi Nahman between life and death ? Previously he had lived here, and now he had chosen his abode in the grave, and lived there. It was as if he had gone from one room to the other and he would surely hear if they called him.

## X.

The Hassidim of Bratzlav found themselves in a very difficult position after the death of their master. Rabbi Nahman had been their only support against the persecution of the other Hassidim, who were hostile to them. He had treated them with fatherly care and had gathered them like children around him. And now he had left them, and they were forsaken and persecuted.

It was Rabbi Nathan who proved to be their salvation. He made journeys from town to town, visiting the Hassidim of Bratzlav who lived there,

encouraging them, putting new strength into them. He reminded them of the teaching of their master. He interested young and old in the books of Rabbi Nahman, and he won new followers and increased the number of Hassidim of Bratzlav.

Rabbi Nathan was as loyal and devoted to his dead master, as he had been to him during his lifetime. Rabbi Nahman was not dead to him. He believed in the miraculous powers of the "holy man" and he endeavoured to pass on his belief to his followers.

The Hassidism of Bratzlav owes a great debt to Rabbi Nathan. He was an untiring worker. He spent his days wandering from town to town, collecting money in order to publish the works of his master. He succeeded in 1821 in setting up a printing press of his own, from which he published the works and the commentaries of Rabbi Nahman. He strove to spread the works of his master among the Hassidim. And he wrote books himself, which had a very great influence upon the Hassidim of Bratzlav.

Rabbi Nathan regarded his publishing undertaking as a great blessing. He had a synagogue built in the town of Uman, not far from Rabbi Nahman's grave, so that the Hassidim of Bratzlav who came from many parts of the country on pilgrimage to the grave, should be able to worship there, without being subjected to insult by other Hassidim who were hostile to Bratzlav.

In 1822 Rabbi Nathan visited Palestine "to lie upon the holy earth and to breathe the holy air." But even on this long and difficult journey he did not forget his mission to spread the teaching of his master. Wherever he came, in Odessa, Constantinople or Alexandria, his one aim was to popularise the doctrines and to sell the books of Rabbi Nahman. And he succeeded in winning many new Hassidim for Bratzlav. He returned from Palestine in 1823, happy and refreshed, and he threw himself with renewed

energy into his work of popularising the teaching of Rabbi Nahman.

But things did not long continue quiet. When Rabbi Nahman died, his opponents thought that with his death there would be an end of his teachings too, and they ceased to persecute his followers for a time. But when they saw that the spirit of Rabbi Nahman was still alive, they persecuted the Hassidim of Rabbi Nahman more than during the lifetime of their master, whom they had respected as the great grandson of Besht. They opened a violent campaign against the Hassidim of Bratzlav, especially against Rabbi Nathan. They threw stones at him. They laid information with the Government against him. But they failed to achieve their purpose. Rabbi Nathan retained his confidence in his cause, he urged his Hassidim not to despair because they were persecuted. "The time is coming", he used to say, "when all Jews will see on which side the truth and justice lies. Only trust in the great power of the holy master who can make everything good." He ordered the Hassidim to meet together on the Day of the New Year at Rabbi Nahman's grave as they had used to meet at the home of Rabbi Nahman, when he was alive.

"I want to remain among you, and you must visit my grave." These words of Rabbi Nahman became sacred to his Hassidim, right up to our own day. At the present time, nearly a hundred years after the death of Rabbi Nahman, his Hassidim still go on pilgrimage to his grave, especially on the day of the New-Year, in order to pray there. Rabbi Nahman is not dead to them. They speak of him as they would of a man who is alive and always among them. They are distinct from the Hassidim of Besht. They have their own synagogues, and their own customs. The words of their master are always before their eyes and his wishes are law to them. Many of them have at great sacrifice visited Palestine,

at least once, as their master urged them to do. They are always cheerful and happy when they come into the synagogue to pray, they often sing, and on the Sabbath and on holy days they dance.

There is no unlettered person (Am-haaretz) among them. And should such a one come to them, they would instruct him in the Bible and Talmud so that he should be able to understand the words of their Rabbi.

They obey the word of Rabbi Nahman who said: "They will recruit new followers and these in their turn will obtain new followers, and so it will go on without stop."

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IX.

**THE MAID OF LUDOMIR.**



## THE MAID OF LUDOMIR.

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**T**HE Jewish woman was given complete equality in all religious matters among the Hassidic followers of Baal Shem Tob ("Besht").

As the husband is called a "Hassid," so the wife is called a "Hassida." Just like her husband, she goes to the Tzaddik, hands him a slip of paper containing her wishes, and converses with him upon all that concerns her material and spiritual life. Hassidism awoke faith and religious feeling in the heart of the Jewish woman. She returned home from the Tzaddik full of spiritual happiness and strong faith, which increased in intensity after every visit to the Tzaddik. In the spirit of this firm faith she managed her household affairs, educated her children, and exerted an influence for good on her husband, who had to struggle for his daily bread. "God, praised be His name! will be merciful," is her ever-recurring consolation. It is usually she who takes the husband from his daily worldly cares and leads him to the Tzaddik. She leads him to the source from which they are both to obtain courage and intellectual strength, faith in God and in the Tzaddik. She complains to the Tzaddik of the difficulties of everyday life, the anxieties of bringing up their children, her sins and her difficulties in serving God. The husband remains silent; for worry about his business and his daily bread have

hardened his heart and enfeebled his intellect. She is more familiar with the affairs of the house than he.

[Hassidism also accorded the right to the woman to rise to the rank of a Tzaddik.] If she were worthy, nothing could stand in her way. Indeed, there were several Hassidic women who reached a position of which few men were worthy.

Of great interest is the mysterious figure which appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and is immortalised in Hassidic legends under the name of "The Maid of Ludomir." She was born in 1815, in the town of Ludomir, Poland, and was the only daughter of Monesh Werbemacher, a man of wealth, and by no means an ignoramus. She acquired great knowledge of Talmudic *Aggada*, of *Midrashim*, and of edifying literature. The girl prayed like a man, and her prayers were so inspired and ecstatic that it excited great astonishment in the neighbourhood.

The inhabitants of her native town were sure that the daughter of Monesh was worthy of becoming a Tzaddik.

Her rare endowments and her father's position directed upon Hanna Rachel the attention of the match makers. They proposed splendid matches for her from other towns. The offers were declined by her father, because he had decided not to give her a big dowry. And so Hanna Rachel became engaged to a young man in her native town. This event brought about a great revolution in her intellectual life. She loved her betrothed whom she had known from her earliest childhood, loved him as much as an affectionate soul is capable of loving; she longed to be alone with him, to tell him her feelings; but this was an impossibility according to the customs of that time. The meeting of engaged couples before marriage was strictly prohibited. The girl fell ill owing to her ardent desire for her lover. No one noticed her mental suffering.

Her father was always occupied with his business, and her mother, who loved her daughter greatly, died just about this time. The girl began to retire from all human society. She used to sit all day long in her room, and she went out very rarely, and then only to visit the grave of her mother, where she would cry her heart out. Once, says the legend, Hanna Rachel fell asleep on the grave of her mother. When she awoke it was dark, and there was no one to be seen in the cemetery. The girl was terrified being alone in this kingdom of death. She ran through the old cemetery, which held the bodies of holy men of old. And she stumbled and fell over one of the graves. She cried out and fainted. The old sexton heard the cry and came out, and when the girl awoke he took her to her father's house. After this, Hanna Rachel was dangerously ill for a long time ; she did not speak at all. The physicians had given up all hope of her recovery, when one day she asked her father to come to her, and said to him : "I have just been in Heaven at a sitting of the highest court (*Beth Din*), and there they gave me a new and sublime soul." She recovered a few days later. Thenceforth her conduct was that of a man. She put on the garment with four corners, (*Tzitzith*), wrapped herself in a praying shawl or *Talith*, and wound phylacteries (*Tefillen*) round her arm and on her forehead. She spent the day in studying the *Torah* and in praying. She broke off her engagement, and decided to remain a maid, for she had raised herself above carnal desires.

Meanwhile her father died, and left her a considerable fortune. With this money she built a new prayer-house (*Beth Hamedrash*), attached to which was a separate room which was kept locked. In this room she used to sit praying and studying the *Torah*.

Soon the fame of "The Maid of Ludomir" spread to all the neighbouring towns and villages, Men and women went on pilgrimage to her as to a saint ; even learned men and Rabbis visited her. But she did not

allow any one to see her. She sat alone in her room, and through the door her words penetrated into the adjoining rooms where the people assembled.

And she became known as a miracle worker. They said that she knew the mysteries of heaven and earth, and that she knew the art of healing the sick. And indeed she gave curative herbs to the sick who came to her.

Gradually a special group of Hassidim was formed which became known as "The Hassidim of the Maid of Ludomir." They used to pray in her "Beth-Hamed-rash," and every Sabbath they assembled after the "third meal" to listen to her sermons. The words of the preacher reached the hearers in the prayer-house from the adjoining room, into which the "Holy Virgin" had retired.

The famous Tzaddikim of that time were astounded at this new woman colleague, and many of them went to see this phenomenon.

Finally, the Tzaddikim began to wonder whether there was not an "evil spirit" in this strange Virgin. They tried to persuade her to change her manner of living and to marry. She paid no heed to them. But finally she yielded, and became the wife of the celebrated Tzaddik, Rabbi Mordechai of Czernobyl, who prevailed upon her.

Rabbi Mordechai — says the legend — used to say of the Maid of Ludomir: "We do not know whose soul, the soul of which great Tzaddik, is dwelling in this woman, but it must be very difficult for the soul of a Tzaddik to find peace in the body of a woman." He thought that through marriage, through the awakening of womanly feelings, he would be able to bring her soul down to a lower and more normal state. But his plan did not succeed. The husband of the Maid of Ludomir shrank from the idea of intercourse with the holy woman, and finally he granted her a divorce. She married again, but was soon again

divorced, and the holy woman of Ludomir remained a virgin till her death.

But after her first marriage, although it was not a real marriage, the influence of the Virgin of Ludomir decreased. They regarded her only as a pious woman (*Tzaddik*), who was full of the "holy spirit" (*Ruach-Hakodesh*), as one of her acquaintances used to say.

Towards the end of her life, the Maid of Ludomir settled in the Holy Land.

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X.

**THE COMMUNAL LIFE OF THE  
HASSIDIM.**



## THE COMMUNAL LIFE OF THE HASSIDIM.

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### I.

**T**HE Rabbinical doctrine, transplanted in the Middle Ages from Sura and Pumbedita to Germany and France, made such an impression on the Jews living in those countries, that in the course of time, their characters became quite different from those of the Spanish Jews who were then strongly under the influence of the mysticism of the Cabbala.

This intellectual differentiation resulted in a serious cleavage between the two representative Jewish types, the rational and the romantic.

The Spanish Jews looked down on the German Jews, making no exception even in favour of the scholars or literary men.

After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain an attempt was made to bring about a reconciliation between the Spanish Jews and the Jews of the other countries, to which the exiles had brought their Jewish mysticism with them. But the antagonism generated through many centuries was not to be so easily overcome.

And Jewish mysticism spread chiefly in the East, where many of the Spanish Jews had found asylum, and the centre of Rabbinism shifted to Greater Poland (Lublin, Cracow, Lemberg), where the Jews who had been oppressed in Germany and Bohemia had taken refuge. There the Cabbala penetrated, the Spanish

school coming first. Then from the East by way of Italy, which was then in close commercial relations with Poland, came the German-Lurian school. Thus the Polish Jews in the 17th and 18th centuries were under the influence of the two schools of Rabbinism and the Cabbala. With the growth of Jewish suffering and distress in Poland, mysticism increased there, preparing a fertile soil for the Pseudo-messianic movements of Sabbathai Zvi and Jacob Frank.

As the influence of Cabbala increased, it drove back Rabbinism more and more, and since the two could not, because of their essential differences live together, Rabbinism turned to Lithuania which was then connected politically with Poland.

The big Yeshibots were established there and the studying of *Talmud* with its rationalist "*Pilpul*" conquered the mind of the Jews of Lithuania. Poland, on the other hand, became the centre of Jewish mysticism, but it did not allow the study of the *Talmud* to disappear entirely.

From Poland, the Cabbala penetrated to the Jews of the Ukraine, where Rabbinism had never taken deep root.

So we see that the Jews, in spite of the homogeneity of their political and geographical position, came under the influence of diverse schools of thought to be divided into three different types, the rational Talmudist in Lithuania, the pure mystic in the Ukraine and the rational mystic in Poland, who merged in himself both the rational and the mystic schools.

In the Spanish period mysticism had looked down upon rationalism, but now the Lithuanian Jewish scholar looked down with contempt on the Ukrainian Jew, regarding him as an "Am Haaretz," an "ignorant one," who could not contribute any new ideas or deep thoughts to the Cabbala. He clung to it merely out of simple-heartedness. The Jews of the Ukraine found sympathy and support only among the Polish Jews, whose beliefs were similar to their own.

The Hassidism of Baal-Shem found Judaism in this position and set itself the task of acting as a mediator between the two extremes. If the Baal-Shem did not achieve his object of bringing about a perfect unity among the Jews, he did succeed though in gathering many of them together under one flag.

No school of thought was better adapted to bridge the precipice of divergent opinions than Hassidism. "Unity among the comrades" and "Love," were the chief axioms of the doctrine preached by the Baal-Shem.

"I have come into this world," he once replied to a man who had asked him why he discountenanced penance and fasting, "to point a way, namely, that man shall make his goal in life the observance of three rules: Love of God, Love of Israel, and Love of Torah; and then penance will be unnecessary."

Hassidism claimed love and sympathy for everyone, and with open arms received all who had been ejected from the Rabbinical camp. "No blame and no abuse," was the teaching of the Baal-Shem, "we must look for a justification of all things. If you see something bad in a man, you must not overlook the fact that in this man too His Name is manifest. Praised be His Name, for no place is without him.

"Therefore we have no right to blame a man, even though he be a sinner, for in evil also we find good, and the lie has a latent truth in it. If you wish to lead your neighbour into the right path, you must do it out of love; also you must pray for your enemies."

These ethical principles, the spirit of the mysterious peculiar to Hassidism, its great ecstasy, its great longing for the spiritual, for the eternal, helped it to effect a reconciliation of the differences.

It gave life and vigour to Hassidism at its inception. It sought not to separate, but to unite, not to demolish but to construct, not to break asunder, but to join

together. If destruction was necessary, it was only where it was essential for the purpose of reconstruction.

If Cabbala, the forerunner of Hassidism, had been able to do something towards uniting the two extremes, Hassidism, with its untapped power of vitality was able to do it to a much greater extent from the very beginning. Under its flag gathered the various kinds of Jews, in Poland, Lithuania and the Ukraine. Hassidism held together its scattered followers with fine threads, but strong, held them in Karlin, Minsk and even in Vilna, the stronghold of its greatest opponent, the Vilna Gaon.

At first secretly, then, as it saw its power growing, more openly and aggressively. It soon began to claim special modes of living for its followers, it demanded for them special prayer-books, separate synagogues, Rabbis, printing-presses and ritual slaughterers. It sought to build up its own spiritual centre within the larger Jewish community. And the larger Jewish community began to attack it; there was denunciation and even excommunication.

It was the urgent need of expansion that induced Rabbi Baer of Meseritch, the successor to Baal-Shem, to choose Meseritch as his residence, and not the "Holy City" of Medsibosh, where his predecessor had lived and was buried. (Meseritch was a Volhynian frontier town between Lithuania and Poland).

Rabbi Baer, one of the founders of Hassidism, endeavoured by the force of his powerful personality to unite the three Jewish types in Hassidism; and in a certain sense he succeeded. On his death, many of his disciples returned to their native countries and there tried to spread Hassidism as they had learned it from their master.

Hassidism exerted a strongly unifying influence in Jewry.

Serious differences had existed between the Spanish and the German Jews in Palestine, and there was constant friction and unpleasantness. The leaders of

the German Jews complained bitterly of the attitude of the Spanish Jews, but when Rabbi Mendel of Vitebsk, a pupil of Baal-Shem and of Rabbi Baer of Meseritz, went to Palestine in 5637 and made many followers there, the hostility between the two communities began to disappear. The Spanish Jews became more conciliatory towards the other Jews in Palestine; there was even inter-marriage with the German Jews, which had been strictly prohibited previously.

They had found in Hassidism an echo of the ancient Jewish mysticism for which they had been longing.

## II.

Since the time of the Essenes, who had much in common with the Hassidim, there has been no sect in Judaism with its own distinct spiritual and social customs; for the Karaites were outside official Judaism. The Hassidim founded a well-organised independent sect, without separating themselves from official Judaism. It is true that they became divided up into many groups, each with its own Zaddik and leader. But in spite of these differences, there was an internal agreement between them which bound them together as the links of one chain. The various dynasties and their followers are often violently opposed to each other, but outwardly they presented a united front for protection and aggression, one sect, the sect of Hassidism. The Zaddik is the head of the sect — the superman of Hassidism. Not elected to his high office by his followers, as was the custom of the Essenes. Baal-Shem the founder of Hassidism chose his successor, Rabbi Baer of Meseritz, and initiated him into his duties. On the death of Rabbi Baer, the most important of his disciples accepted leadership in different places. It was rare for a Rabbi to be appointed by election. (The leadership generally passed from father to son.) For the son of the Zaddik is holy from the time he was in his mother's womb.

“sanctified by the holy thoughts of his father at the moment of his conception—a son of God.” Thus the various “Zaddik-Dynasties” came into being. In Hassidism the Zaddik plays a part similar to that of Jesus in Christianity. The same cause that led to the break between the Christians and the Pharisees led to the break between the Zaddikim and the Rabbis, the successors to the Pharisees. Jesus excited the wrath of the Pharisees not only by his doctrines, which had already been preached in pre-Christian Judaism, particularly by the Prophets, but by his manner of preaching. “For he taught the people as One who had full authority, and not as One who had been taught by the scribes” (Matthew VII—29). It was this confidence of Jesus in himself that roused the wrath and enmity of the Pharisees. The Pharisees issued laws for the people on the basis of the Torah. The Torah was the centre, the authority, and the Pharisees were only the mediators. Then Jesus came and spoke in his own way without quoting any source or authority, as though he himself represented the Torah. “I say unto thee—Thou hast heard... it is said... but I say unto thee...”

Therefore the person of Jesus represents to Christianity what the Torah under the influence of the Pharisees represents to Judaism. But in sentimental Judaism, and especially in Hassidism, the Zaddik comes forward with his powerful personality, without leaning for support on the Torah. He is there instead of the Torah, so that the Rabbi who recognises the Torah as the only authority, naturally resented the appearance of the Zaddikim and opposed them. The Zaddik was to his followers “the foundation of the world,” “the soul and the life of the world.” The people who surround him are like bodies which serve as a frame for the soul. The Zaddik is “the mediator between the people and God,” he is the artery through which life streams into the limbs of his contemporaries from the source of life. “He is a part of the Godhead.”

"God takes, as it were, a light from his own Supreme Being, lets it radiate into the world, and in this way the Zaddik comes forth." The Zaddik merges into one with God. It is in his power to forgive sins.

The Zaddik is the head of the Hassidim who cling to him in simple-mindedness. Hassidism is constantly strengthening the simple and undivided belief of its adherents in the Zaddik.

"The Hassidim dare not," commanded Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, "turn from the words of the Zaddik, neither to the right nor to the left; the Hassid must put aside his wisdom and his reason. as if he never had any other than that which he has received from the Zaddik." And also "Let not your thoughts take you unawares by showing you anything dubious in the conduct of the true Zaddik."

Thus the Zaddik resembles his Creator, in this regard, that some of his doings must remain incomprehensible to us.

The Hassid must not make the mistake of sometimes thinking that the Zaddik, God forbid, is acting in contradiction to the Torah. For the Zaddik stands higher than the Torah.

The Torah was given into his hand, and he may explain the meaning of the Torah according to his own idea. He is himself the Law and the Right. The Zaddik is closely bound up with his Hassidim. He needs them as they need him, as the body needs the soul and the soul the body. The Zaddik is indeed "the powerful Hero," but he cannot do without his followers as his helpers in combat.

"Why should you worry?" said Rabbi Nahman to his Hassidim, "give me only the bricks and mortar and I shall build great, high structures with them." Another time he said: "I can restore everything which you have spoilt hitherto."

Sometimes the Zaddik descends from his high place, in order to raise to himself the fallen ones.

"He who wishes to lift his neighbour from the swāmp must himself jump into it."

The Zaddik is always thinking of the welfare of his followers. "Not for one hour do I turn my eyes from you," wrote Rabbi Mendel from Palestine to his Hassidim in Russia, "every one of you is enshrined in my heart."

The Zaddik lives in comfort. The Hassidim willingly relieve him of all material cares, so that he may be free to devote his time to "heavenly affairs."

The "Court" of the Zaddik is maintained at the expense of his Hassidim. It consists of splendid buildings, fine gardens, cars, gold and silver plate, menservants and maidservants — and also the personal attendants of the Zaddik — the "Gabaim." The first Zaddikim lived very poorly. They too received considerable sums from their followers, but they gave away almost all of it in charity.

Baal-Shem did not lie down to sleep until he had given away all his money to poor people. Once when he found it impossible to sleep, he got up, felt in his pockets and discovered a few small coins there. His disciple, Rabbi Nahum of Tchernobyl, gave away all he received for "the ransoming of prisoners" and to provide wedding-outfits for poor brides. He himself lived in the most dire poverty. The records of the "Chevra Kadisha," the Burial Society in Tchernobyl, contain a very characteristic note in this regard. Rabbi Nahum was admitted as a member, but being unable to pay the contribution of three Roubles in cash, he was obliged to give as security the book "Sefer Hassidim." This is how the head of the Hassidism of that time lived.

But with the death of the first line of the dynasties a period of luxurious living began. The Rabbinical "Court" with all its comforts and fine equipment came into being.

The son and successor of Rabbi Nahum, Rabbi Mordchya, lived sumptuously; he had his carriage and four just like the members of the Polish nobility.

The Hassidim did not object. On the contrary, they saw it as a "Gadluth Hamoreh" (mental edification), and they believed that angels accompanied the carriage.

Some branches of the dynasty acquired very great riches. There was the Zaddik Rabbi Nahum, a grandchild of Rabbi Mordchya, who had a Hanukah Menorah of pure gold and silver; a famous smith had made it, working for many years. It was as big as a man, and ornamented with embossed figures, trees, flowers and a cottage. Rabbi David of Talna had an arm-chair made like a throne, all of silver, and it put him in great peril. Someone told the authorities that the chair bore an inscription reading: "David, King of Israel," and Rabbi David had to flee from Russia, and he settled in Brody, a town in Galicia.

The other members of the dynasty also built themselves beautiful houses and furnished them richly. They found a way of ensuring their revenue by introducing the system of "Moamadot" (a sort of Peter's-pence, which every Hassid had to pay), and they sent out emissaries to collect the money.

In addition, every Hassid, when he visited the Rabbi, handed over together with his "Quittel" (a note on which he wrote down what he desired), a certain sum of money, "Pidyon" or ransom money. Everyone gave as much as he could afford, often more than he could afford, according to the discretion of the Zaddik. The amount of the ransom money always had a symbolical meaning, eighteen, or a multiplication of this number, the sum of which is equal to the word "chay," living.

There were some Zaddikim who demanded big sums from their followers, who did not, however, regard it as in any way wrong, but, on the contrary, said that the Zaddik only takes the money in order to bring forth latent holy sparks.

They say of the Zaddik of Tcherkassy (in the Province of Kiev) that he asked his Hassidim to give

him such sums as were equivalent to the number produced by the letters of their names, and this in Roubles. If the resulting number was not large enough, the Zaddik found a way out by asking the Hassid to pay according to the sum of his wife's name. To one Hassid whose wife's name was Chaye, so that he had to pay 23 Roubles, the Zaddik said: "But I am sure that you sometimes call your wife "Chayele," and on that you must give me 100 Roubles." This was specially characteristic of the Sagadora dynasty.

They had palaces with summer and winter gardens, they had gold and silver plate, and well-stocked libraries, and they were able to accumulate also large sums of money. Some of the Zaddikim protested vigorously against this indulgence in luxury, but others approved of it, and saw wonderful secrets in this way of living.

The house of the Zaddik is the meeting-place of his followers. Several times during the year, at least once, on the high holidays, every Hassid must make the pilgrimage to his Zaddik, to see how he lives, to listen to his discourses and his stories, and to receive his blessing and his advice.

The Hassid or his wife must in every circumstance of their life consult the Zaddik, and if a member of the family falls ill, they go to the Zaddik for a cure.

Every Zaddik has a "Sefer Refuoth," a cabbalistic medicinal Treatise, containing an infallible remedy for every disease. In addition to prayers and amulets, these are principally various kinds of grasses and herbs. Some of the Zaddikim would not permit their followers to consult "profane doctors." "The angel of death," said Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, "could not get through his task of killing people, so the doctors were sent to help him."

If a poor Hassid did not have enough money to pay his travelling expenses to visit the Zaddik, the

others saw to it, that he was provided with the money. He must not dare to be absent. The Hassid very often preferred to go to the Zaddik on foot, for every step of his pilgrimage was noted down in heaven. "With each of your footsteps an angel comes forth," said Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav.

Every Zaddik has his synagogue where his followers worship on Sabbaths and festivals. The Zaddik is not to be seen there; he prays in a room adjoining the "Holy of Holies."

When the service is ended, he opens the door, the Hassidim file past him, greet him and he answers them with a nod.

On the Sabbath and on festivals the Hassidim take the "sacred meals" at the table of the Zaddik. While they eat there is complete silence. Sometimes the Zaddik speaks Torah, that is to say, he explains a part of the Bible which is fitting to the day. All listen with respect. The Zaddik tastes only a little of each course. The "shirayim" (remains) are divided among the guests. The table of the Zaddik is termed by the Hassidim the "Altar of God," and the meal is "the sacrifice of God." While the Zaddik is taking the food, he is the High Priest making the offering to God. This too, is reminiscent of the meals of the Essenes.

The third meal at the end of the Sabbath day is a particularly solemn ritual. When the first evening prayer (Mincha) has been said, the Hassidim come together to join the Zaddik in the final Sabbath meal. They eat very little; there is only one course, fish, which has played a great part in Jewish mysticism since the time of the Talmud. The Hassidim sit at the table in the dark and there is a feeling of holiness around. The Zaddik with his eyes closed and in a melancholy voice recites some mystic hymns, verse by verse, and all the Hassidim repeat them in chorus, verse by verse.

And they stay together like this till night.

After the evening prayer (Marab) has been said, the Zaddik repeats the "Hamabdil" prayer, which is the farewell to the Sabbath and a prayer to God who distinguishes "between the holy and the unholy, between light and darkness, between Jews and Gentiles, between the Sabbath and the weekday."— Before he says this prayer, the Zaddik repeats a Yiddish prayer, which was spread in the Ukraine by the celebrated Zaddik, Rabbi Levi-Yizhok of Berditshev. The essence of this is as follows: "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, guard Thy people Israel from every evil. The holy Sabbath is passing away, grant that the week may bring a pure faith, love for our neighbours, reconciliation with God, a speedy redemption and the resurrection of the dead."

This prayer is pronounced by the Zaddik with much fervour and ecstasy. The Hassidim sitting around repeat it in a subdued voice, word for word. When it is finished, the Hassidim stay behind, talking about their Zaddik. They weigh each of his words, find a meaning in every nod of his head, every twinkle of his eyes. They all sit close together; one speaks and the others listen. Every difference between them has gone, they are no longer rich and poor, great and small.

The wife of a Hassid who has made the pilgrimage to the Zaddik, either alone or together with her husband, may also sit there, at a proper distance and listen. But she spends her time mostly with the wife of the Rabbi, partakes of the holy meal in her company and she also receives of the "shirayim." The Hassidim do not leave the "Court" before they have received the blessing of the wife of the Zaddik.

The Zaddik lives a life of special solemnity during the high holidays. "On these days," said Rabbi Feivish of Heritreh, the pupil of Rabbi Baer of Meseritz, "on the New-Year and the Day of Atonement, we must

pray to God, to enable us to approach him with faith and with love, that he should take possession of our soul, and that the conception of God in our soul during the year may serve and guide us, and that our steps should not stray from the path of righteousness; for strong is the power of evil. To keep us from wrong God has given us the holy days, on which his light shines at its brightest, and enters into our hearts. Such days are chiefly the days of Rosh-Hashana and Yom-Kippur, which may be said to be the brain and the heart of the whole year. Time carries within itself emblems of every part of the human body. Therefore in the book of Yetzirah, "world, year, organism" are all represented by one sign. Rosh-Hashana is the head, and in the same way as all sensual feelings disappear before the strength of the brain, so all the spiritual forces of man, world and time are concentrated in Rosh-Hashana, in the head of the world, as on the day of the creation, as His will created the universe. The Day of Atonement is the heart; the time of settlement and of completion, as in the heart of a man the things which have grown in the brain develop into a decision. Therefore, the day of Atonement is regarded as the "illumination of reason," that is to say, "in the heart of a man the knowledge of God matures and awakens us to a state of perfection."

On these Holy days no Hassid may stay behind in his home. Together with his wife and children he goes to the Zaddik. The Zaddikim impressed their followers with the importance of the pilgrimage on these Holy days. "You must do everything that the Zaddik commands you," said Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, "but if he forbids you to go to him on Rosh-Hashana you must not obey."

On these days, the "unity among the comrades" and the worship of the Zaddik reaches its highest pitch. The Zaddik stands on the plane of "awe"

and "terror." In his burning face and burning eyes, his followers see the gravity of the task which their leader and teacher faces on these days of awe, — to stand before God as the intercessor for his community; to ask Him to forgive their sins and to enter them into the Book of Life.

But even on such solemn days, the Hassidim are far from being sad or grieved, because their doctrine forbids them to sorrow, and exhorts them to rejoice. "Even if one commit a sin," said Baal-Shem, "he must not give himself up to melancholy. That would be to gratify the evil spirit."

"Through joy, we unite ourselves with God." Therefore the Hassidim organised dances on the high holidays: round-dances, in which the Zaddik himself sometimes joined. The reality of life became as nothing to them, they forgot everything, turned round and round for hour after hour, and felt no fatigue.

The house of the Zaddik is not only the centre of their intellectual life. Business relationships, too, are entered into there, with the consent of the Zaddik. Sometimes the Zaddik is admitted into the arrangement as a partner; he does not contribute any money; he gives only his blessing, and in return he receives a part of the profit, without having to share in any loss. It happens very often that children are betrothed to one another on the command of the Zaddik.

At the end of the holy days the Hassidim return to their homes, each to his business, or to his profession. But their own homes are only temporary dwelling-places, their thoughts are always with the Zaddik.

The Hassidim of one Zaddik are on such friendly terms among themselves, that they can always rely on each other's assistance. The Zaddik sees to it, that the needy Hassid should be helped by his brethren. They give special care to the nursing of the sick and to the providing of wedding outfits for poor

brides. The Hassidim regard themselves in their various places of residence as a separate religious group, and in places where they are in a minority, they have their own synagogues, their own Rabbis, their own forms of prayer, and their own ritual slaughterers who are appointed by the Zaddik.

Even when they do not see the Zaddik, they are always in communion with him. No matter how far away they are from him, they meet together on the Sabbath day and on festivals, and they speak about their Zaddik, and about other Zaddikim.

Sometimes it happens that one of them has just returned from his pilgrimage to the Zaddik. Then the others gather round him, and listen eagerly to what he has to say about what he saw at the "court" of the Zaddik.

Each evening, between the first and the second evening-prayer, the Hassidim sit together in groups in their synagogue, talking about Hassidic affairs.

They forget reality and the sorrows of the day; they rise to a state of ecstasy, which is called "Bitul Nayesh," the solution of being.

The Hassidim pray to the Zaddik after his death as they do during his life-time. After his death, too, he is the mediator between Israel and God, and in heaven also, he is trying to protect the Jewish people from harm. The Zaddik is not dead.

The man who knows everything which takes place in heaven and in earth, cannot disappear in death. "Our father Jacob is not dead," says the Talmudic legend. "Also David, king of Israel, is still alive," and every pious Jew repeats this declaration.

On the day on which Rabbi Juda Hanasi disappeared, the "Agada" tells us, the Rabbi said: "He who dares to say that the Rabbi is dead shall be slain by the sword." The Arabs have a similar legend

about Mohammed: "At this moment, as his soul is passing from the body, Omar steps forward with drawn sword and declares: 'He who says that he is dead, shall be pierced by my sword.'" In a similar way also must have originated the story of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and in this way too, came about the belief in the immortality of Baal-Shem. "What difference is there, for him, the Zaddik," said Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, "between life and death? Before he was dwelling here, and now he has taken up his abode in the tomb. It is as if one goes from one room to the other. Surely he hears when we call him." "I want to be always with you," said Rabbi Nahman to his own Hassidim, "you must seek me in my tomb."

The burial-place of the Zaddik in the cemetery is always in a favoured position. Over the grave stands an "Ohel" or mausoleum, large enough to hold a big congregation.

In the midst of the mausoleum is the "sacred tomb," and above it a black wooden pole at the head of the grave, with candles and lamps of oil always burning. Before the Hassidim go to visit the holy grave, they bathe in the "Mikva" (ritual bath), pray with earnest devotion, attire themselves in their holiday apparel, gird their loins as for prayer, just as if the living Zaddik were there to receive them. They make the same preparation before visiting the dead Zaddik, as when they go to the living Zaddik. At the door of the mausoleum, the Hassidim take off their shoes and enter slowly and with great respect. Each lights a candle or a small lamp, and they move slowly up to the sacred tomb, and deposit there a piece of paper on which they have written down their wishes, exactly as they did when they visited the Zaddik while he was alive. They say certain prayers and some psalms.

If a great trouble threatens the Jews or any

particular Jew, not only the Hassidim but also the non-Hassidim go on pilgrimage to the Zaddik's tomb, to pray to him to help them.

The number of pilgrims is particularly large during the month of preparation for penitence which precedes the "days of awe," Rosh-Hashana and Yom-Kippur. Rabbi Feivish of Heritsh said that these are days on which "God's name shines down on his people, sheds its rays upon them with the brightness of fear, and penetrates the heart of the children of Israel. Every man must purify himself on these days in thought and deed, and justify himself in the name of Torah and prayer."

During the month of Elul, the gate of the mausoleum is open all day to the pilgrims who come from the most distant parts. There are such holy tombs in every town in which a Zaddik has lived. Especially well-known are the tombs of Baal-Shem in Medsibosh, of Rabbi Mordechay of Tchernobyl in Ninatovka, near Kiev, of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav in Uman, of Rabbi Levi-Izhock in Berditchev, and of Rabbi Nahum in Tchernobyl.

On the anniversary of the death ("Yahrzeit") of the Zaddik, the Hassidim stay in their synagogues, but not to weep and mourn. The Synagogues are lit up as on holidays. After the prayers, the Hassidim take a meal together, speak about the Zaddik and drink to the health of his successor, his son, who is as holy as the father whose place he occupies, and whose holy work he is continuing. During the festivities which are celebrated in every town where the Rabbi had Hassidim, an amulet sent by his successor is sold by auction. Generally it is a silver coin which has been blessed by the Zaddik, who has held it in his hand and said a prayer over it. Each Hassid bids for it and the one who makes the highest bid, obtains the amulet. The money raised in this way goes to buy brandy. Each Hassid tastes a little of

the brandy and drinks to the health of the giver, the Hassidim, and the whole Jewish community.

### III.

To the present day the Hassidim live in a manner peculiar to themselves, which distinguishes them from other Jews, especially from the "Mithnagdim," if not to a greater degree than previously, at least as much. There have been times, not only immediately after the anathema of the Vilna Gaon, but even much later, when Hassidim and Mithnagdim did not intermarry, and would not eat in each other's homes, because each regarded the food of the other as not "ritual." In spite of this, the Hassidim were never outside official Judaism. For the *Shulchan Aruch* was and is for them, too, the authoritative code of religious life. Only in unessential matters, they did not act exactly in accordance with the letter of this code, which regulates life from birth until death. For example, with regard to the time of prayer. The Mithnagdim say their prayers very early in the morning, because the "*Shulchan Aruch*" requires it. Hassidim however, took the view, that each hour is equally good in order to pour out one's heart to God. He who is unable to follow exactly the regulations with regard to the form of prayer is considered by the Mithnagdim a sinner. He who does not properly understand the prayer, is regarded by them as an insignificant, ignorant person. The Hassidim do not hold this view. Not the outward form, and not the method of doing things are to them the principal consideration, but the "*Kavanah*," the devotion of the heart. "A Jew," says Baal-Shem, "works all day in the market place; towards evening, at dusk, he rises up and says to himself: 'Woe unto me! I have almost forgotten the *Mincha* prayer.' He goes into a house to say his prayer, not knowing what his lips are

saying, and nevertheless all the angels tremble at his prayer."

Hassidim on the whole do not pay great attention to the details of the commandments, saying that this restrains and limits the higher joy which should be obtained by the fulfilment of the commandment. Baal-Shem impressed the following on his adherents: "If you perform an act, it is not necessary to perform it with excessive scrupulousness, for this is induced by the evil spirit. It makes a man think that perhaps he has not done his duty. And he becomes sad, and sadness is a great hindrance to divine worship."

The Talmud and its commentaries are just as sacred to the Hassidim as to other Jews. They differ only in this, that they do not find salvation in intensive study and in Pilpul. "All these scholars," said Rabbi Jacob-Joseph of Polona, "accumulate ingenious Commentary on Commentary, to show their erudition and their sagacity. But this is only the shell, the external. Hassidism demands for the study of the Talmud, pure intentions, with which to adhere in holiness and purity to the letters of the Talmud potentially and actually, in word and thought." "For the letters are the chambers of the Holy one, praised be He! out of which he allows his light to radiate." Therefore Hassidim do not insist that one should spend one's whole time in the study of the Talmud, as the Mithnagdim do.

Baal-Shem says: "This is the Evil spirit which leads people astray, so that they occupy themselves exclusively with the study of the Talmud and its commentaries." He himself was allowed to observe higher things not because of his study of the Talmud and other religious books, but because of his prayers, which he repeated with great devotion, and thus he edified himself, in the firm conviction that everything conceals within itself worlds and divine souls. Hassidism knows that it is possible to find one's way to God just as easily in a conversation with one's neighbour

in the street as through the study of the Talmud and praying. "Sometimes," says Baal-Shem, "a man goes about and speaks to people and is incapable of study. He must only cling to God and think constantly of Him; just as when a man is on a journey and is disturbed in his study or prayer, he must serve God in other ways. He must not take it to heart, for God wishes us to serve Him in every way, at one time in one way, at another time in another way. Therefore God has arranged that a man should go on a journey or have social intercourse with other people, so that he may have an opportunity of serving Him in other ways also." Not everything is written down in the Shulchan Aruch, nor handed down from father to son; there are many other ways also which lead people to God. Hassidism holds that a man must know how to raise everything to unity through his thoughts, his words and his deeds, so that everything should be entirely and truly consecrated to God, for there is nothing in the world which can be shut out from unity with God, and he who does something that is not for God, separates this thing from His unity. Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polona ventured to give utterance to the following, as a result of which he made many enemies: "A man must not accustom himself to pass all his time in study, he must also seek intercourse with other people, but he must always have the piety of God on his face, according to the word: "I always have God before my eyes."

The Hassidim place on an equal level with the Talmud, if not higher, the Zohar, the Bible of the Cabbala, which is supposed to have been written by the Tannai, Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai.

The Zohar is studied diligently by people who understand neither its Aramaic style, nor its deep mystic contents. The words of the Zohar are from the Hassidic point of view, holy and beneficial to the

souls of those who pronounce them, even if they do not understand their meaning.

In addition to the Zohar, great value is placed upon the "Chovath Halvavot" in its ethical parts, "Mnorat Hamoir," the "Holy Shelah" ("Shne Luchoth Habrith"), "Ruchut Chochmah" and the holy "Or Hachaim."

Above all, the Hassidim steep themselves in the study of their own literature, the books of the Zaddikim, from the collected discourses of Baal-Shem and the writings of his disciples, down to the works of their latest leader. The chief lectures consist of sacred tales, which have passed from mouth to mouth and were not written down till much later. It is a duty in Hassidism to listen to, and to tell such sacred tales, especially where they deal with the life of the Zaddikim. "These tales are a salvation for the soul."

Hassidic literature is the principal subject taught to the children of the Hassidim. The children are made familiar with the Talmud, but not to the same extent as the children of the Mithnagdim who give themselves up to the study of the Talmud and its commentaries. The Hassidim did not have Yeshiboth of their own and they did not send their children to the Yeshiboth which were founded by the Mithnagdim. The study of the Talmud was to them not an object in itself, and moreover, they regarded the study of the Mithnagdim as no true study, but as "a soulless study."

The Hassidic father sends his son to the Cheder of a Hassidic teacher, where he begins by learning the five books of Moses with Rashi's Commentaries. When he is a little older, he is initiated into the commentaries known as "Or Hachaim." Of the other books of the Bible, he is taught in particular the Psalms, which are to serve him all his life as a guide. Every day, after he has said his prayers, the Hassid

reads ten chapters from the Psalms, and every Sabbath he reads all the Psalms. The Hassidic student obtains only a superficial knowledge of the Talmud. He receives his main education in the home of his parents and at the Hassidic meetings, especially in the prayer-houses of the Hassidim, where he joins the adults and hears the legends and stories of the life of the Zaddik.

When the child is "Barmitzvah" (becomes religiously of age) his father takes him for the first time to the Zaddik, and the child sees the man whom he has been taught to regard with reverence from his infancy. The Zaddik with his own hands draws the straps of the phylacteries round the head and the arm of the "Barmitzvah" and blesses him that he should "go in the right path." From this hour on, the boy is not only a fully-fledged Jew, who is obliged according to the Shulchan Aruch, to keep all the 613 commandments and to abstain from prohibited things, but he is equal to all other Hassidim. He soon prays with the same devotion as the adults, and takes part in the common meals every Sabbath in the prayer-house. He also accustoms himself to go to the Mikvah, (the ritual bath), for this is one of the chief commandments of the Hassidim, in which regard too, they recall the Essenes. Before the morning prayer, they dip into the ritual bath, especially on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays and on the Sabbath. A few years later, the youth is received officially into the circle. He goes on a pilgrimage to the Zaddik and for the first time hands him a "letter of alliance," a symbol of the bond of unity that exists between the Hassid and the Zaddik. The letter is written according an established formula, and declares that the Hassid binds his soul to the soul of the Zaddik, and has devoted to him all his 248 limbs and 365 veins, that he will obey him, and so forth. These new recruits are the joy of the Zaddik, for he sees in them his future, a young, virile generation, which

will live in his spirit. "It is not good to be old," said Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, "neither an old Hassid nor an old Zaddik. It is good to rejuvenate oneself each day."

The Hassidic youth generally marries very early, at latest in his eighteenth year. His parents or the Zaddik take care that his wife should be the daughter of a Hassid, and preferably of a Hassid of the same Zaddik.

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XI.

**PALESTINE AND HASSIDISM.**



## PALESTINE AND HASSIDISM.

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**P**ALESTINE was always the centre of things for Judaism. In this respect, Rabbinism did not differ from mystical Judaism (Cabbala). But to Rabbinism, Palestine held the promise of the future, when the Temple would be rebuilt, while to mystical Judaism Palestine was good and holy always. Even in its desolation, Hassidism saw it as the land which God is always watching and tending. To mystical Judaism, the desolated Palestine of today, and the Palestine of the glorious past, are one and the same. It believes that the souls of the prophets, of the great men of Israel, and of its saints who once lived in Palestine, are still hovering there in the air. It sees in Palestine the manifestation of all lofty things, of the same great and lofty things that the prophets once saw there. It hears in Palestine the sound of the voice of the prophets, which when it spoke made the air tremble and the worlds shake above and below. It sees the whole of Jewish history in Palestine.

To mystical Judaism there is no difference between the past, the present and the future in Palestine. Palestine is to it the essence of all that is spiritual.

From the day when the spirit of God was found there, from the day when the prophets saw their visions and spoke their words there—the words of God—the ground of Palestine has been holy, and

the spirit of God is always there. Its holiness cannot be destroyed; nothing can diminish it.

Mystical Judaism endeavoured to induce the Jews to leave the "foreign countries" in which they lived and go to the "Holy Land," to live there and to breathe the sacred air. Only in Palestine, it held, could the Jews renew the great past of their people. Only in Palestine would the "great day" come for Judaism, when the past would be restored in all its glory.

The Hassidism of Besht, which is the continuation of the Cabbala, also sought to strengthen the love of the Jews for Palestine. "Zion," said the Maggid of Meseritch, "is absolute in the world, it is the life of all countries; therefore all countries have a part in Palestine, and each country takes its physical and spiritual life from its part in Palestine." "Palestine," said Rabbi Mendel of Vitebsk, "is the Shechina itself." "The absolute of spirit and wisdom," said Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, "is only found in Palestine. There a man can attain to his highest degree; to be like Him, praised His name."

The followers of Besht constantly incited a longing for Palestine in the heart of the Jews. Rabbi Shneur Salomon of Lady did everything possible to rouse love for Palestine. "This love must be as a fire burning in the heart of the Jew," he used to say. "He who wishes to be a true Jew must go to Palestine; and if there be obstacles in the way, he must overcome them all and go there."

Not with words alone did the Zaddikim try to persuade the people to go to Palestine. They tried to show them how dear Palestine was to them, and that it was the chief objective of their endeavours. They were convinced that only in Palestine could the idea of Hassidism reach its highest level, a height which it was impossible to attain in alien lands. Their desire was to make Palestine their "spiritual centre," from which to send out its rays to all the corners of the

earth in which the Jews were in exile. They felt that Hassidism was the last link in the chain of Jewish mysticism, and that it was not possible for it to attain a high spiritual level, or to exert a great influence over the Jews until it was saturated with the air of Palestine.

Palestine has twice been the "spiritual centre" of the Jews in Exile. The first time was a hundred years before the destruction of the Temple. The Jews scattered in the various countries at that time were under the influence of Palestine. From this great "spiritual centre" the rays went out, shedding their light on the countries of the Exile.

Gradually Jewish mysticism passed from Palestine over Italy and made its way into Poland and other countries, where it won the hearts of the Jews who lived there.

And the second time was in the seventeenth century, when Palestine was again the "spiritual centre" of the "Exile."

The Zaddikim who were at the head of Hassidism at the beginning, wanted to make Palestine for the third time the "spiritual centre" of the Jews.

The first to make the attempt was Baal-Shem himself. All his life he wanted to go to Palestine, but he was not able to carry out his wish. "Heaven held him back," say the Hassidim, "because it knew that if Besht were to come to Palestine with his doctrine, he would diminish the time of the coming of the Messiah; but the time was not yet ripe for this." The disciples of Besht also wanted to go to Palestine to live there, but they could not leave Besht, who was called upon, they said, to remain in Exile, like Moses in his day.

The first of the Zaddikim to go to Palestine was Rabbi Gershon Kitov, the brother-in-law of Besht. It was he who laid the foundation stone of the third "spiritual centre" of Hassidism in Palestine.

After the death of Besht two of his disciples were able to go to the Holy Land. These were Rabbi Nahman of Horodensky and Rabbi Nahman of Primishlin.

But the first attempt to go to Palestine in any numbers was not made till about seventeen years after the death of Besht. In this year several disciples of Besht, Rabbi Baer, the Magid of Meseritch, Rabbi Mendel of Vitebsk, and Rabbi Israel Polizker went to Palestine, and with them went more than three hundred men, women and children.

It is easy to understand their joy in being in Palestine for which they had yearned so long.

"At last the day has come for which we have waited with such impatience," cried Rabbi Israel Polizker in great ecstasy, "how happy we are here in our wonderful land, in this country which is the holy of holies." They believed that the "Divine Assembly" had sent them on their journey. And they regarded everything which happened to them on the way as a sign from Heaven.

The community of Hassidim in Palestine, which was growing ever larger in numbers, attracted the attention of Hassidim in foreign countries, and these too wanted to go to Palestine and live there. This mystic Palestine movement made a great impression on a young Zaddik of the time, a man of much feeling and great talent, Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav. His desire to go to Palestine, "to the country of life, the holy land," grew so great that he paid no heed to the difficulties and to the appeals of his family that he should remain in Exile with them. He was anxious to go there as quickly as possible, "to kiss the soil, to breathe its holy air, and to lie in its shade."

And so Rabbi Nahman overcame all difficulties and in 1749 he arrived in Palestine. He was twenty-six years of age at the time. He stayed in Palestine only for six months. He visited all the holy places and prostrated himself before all the tombs of the

**Zaddikim.** Palestine exercised a great influence upon his life, and his great wish was that he should be able to stay there. But he could not desert his Hassidim, who were segregated from the other Hassidim, and he had to return to the Exile. But Palestine had made a deep impression on him which remained with him for the rest of his life. "The life I possess," he said when he returned home, "is due only to my having been in Palestine." And from that time onward he ignored the life which he had lived before he had made his journey to Palestine, and he commanded his followers not to include words which he had uttered before his visit to the "Holy Land" in the doctrine of Hassidism, because they were to him as unripe fruit.

He ordered his Hassidim to visit Palestine at least once in their lifetime.

The yearning for Palestine was more deep and powerful among the Hassidim than among the other Jews. The majority of those who went to Palestine during the last century were Hassidim.

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